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Pharmacy regulators doubt need to legalize marijuana

By *TONY LEYS*
tleys@dmreg.com

Iowa pharmacy regulators expressed skepticism Monday about the need to follow other states in legalizing the medical use of marijuana.

The Iowa Board of Pharmacy, under orders from a district judge, took up the issue but quickly dismissed it.

Board member DeeAnn Wedemeyer Oleson said evidence presented earlier by pro-marijuana activists was "woefully inadequate."

Advocates have contended that the board must allow medical uses of marijuana because 13 other states allow it.

Wedemeyer Oleson, a Guthrie Center pharmacist, said the activists' reasoning reminded her of an argument she made to her father when she was a teen-ager.

She said she insisted that he let her to stay out until 1 a.m. because her friends' parents allowed them to do so. "He said, 'If your friends jumped off a bridge, does that mean you should jump off a bridge?'"

Several other board members echoed Wedemeyer Oleson's concerns about marijuana's safety. None spoke in favor of legalizing the drug.

After a 15-minute discussion, the board asked its lawyer to draft a position for a vote at a later meeting.

Polk District Judge Joel Novak ruled in April that the board had to consider the issue. He made the ruling in a lawsuit brought by medical-marijuana advocates, who said regulators were unfairly refusing to even discuss it.

Although the board labeled Monday's meeting a hearing, it didn't give advocates a chance to speak. Board members said they'd heard the activists' arguments in the past.

Carl Olsen of Des Moines, who speaks for Iowans for Medical Marijuana, vowed afterward to take the matter back to court.

He said the board is required to allow doctors to prescribe drugs accepted for medical use in the United States.

Olsen said some patients clearly benefit from marijuana. "If a guy's growing marijuana because it's good for his AIDS and it's the only thing that will save his life, why should he go to prison for that?" he asked. "It just doesn't make sense. Where's the victim?"

Besides the court fight, Olsen said his group would continue to press the Legislature to legalize the drug.