

Medical marijuana hearing is Wednesday in Iowa City

By JAMES Q. LYNCH, *Globe Des Moines Bureau*

IOWA CITY — Peggy Whitworth will be listening Wednesday for “real information” about the pros and cons of the medical use of marijuana.

One of two public members on the Iowa Board of Pharmacy, Whitworth will be listening to testimony from medical professionals, law enforcement officials, substance abuse counselors and others at the board’s third public hearing from noon to 7 p.m. in the third floor auditorium of the Bowen Science Building, 51 Newton Road, Iowa City.

Members of the general public may speak at the hearing, too. Comments will be limited to about five minutes, a board spokeswoman said.

“The topic has generated a lot of interest — and confusion that somehow holding hearings is advocating for legalization,” Whitworth said.

The issue has been around for years, but Whitworth said there has been a dearth of reliable information on which to base a recommendation for the use of marijuana as a pain reliever.

“Much of the information was undocumented at worst or simply hearsay,” she said. “I thought it was appropriate to find more science and more real information.”

Even if the seven-member board recommends legalizing the medical use of marijuana, that decision will be up to the Iowa Legislature, explained Whitworth, Cedar Rapids, who was appointed by Gov. Chet Culver.

So far, it does not appear a majority of lawmakers are ready to go that route, according to House Majority Leader Pat Murphy, D-Dubuque. A recommendation from the pharmacy board would lend credibility to a legislative debate, he said.

Currently, marijuana — cannabis — is a Schedule I substance under Iowa law. Thirteen states have medical marijuana laws that protect most patients from the threat of arrest.

“That means it’s not legal in 37,” Whitworth said.

Iowans for Medical Marijuana has been working since about 1990 to get the state of Iowa to recognize the potential medical benefits of the drug. It has petitioned the pharmacy board to recognize that marijuana has accepted medical uses and remove it from Schedule I, the most restrictive class of drugs.

The pharmacy board may decide whether to make a recommendation when it meets in December, a staff member said.