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Sativex, a Pot-based Prescription Drug Looks for FDA OK

Twenty five years ago, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first prescription drugs based on the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. A recent USA Today article recently noted that additional medicines derived from or inspired by the cannabis plant itself could soon be making their way to pharmacy shelves, according to drug companies, small biotech firms and university scientists.

A British company, GW Pharma, is in advanced clinical trials for the world's first pharmaceutical developed from raw marijuana instead of synthetic equivalents— a mouth spray it hopes to market in the U.S. as a treatment for cancer pain. And it hopes to see FDA approval by the end of 2013. Sativex contains marijuana's two best known components — delta 9-THC and cannabidiol — and already has been approved in Canada, New Zealand and eight European countries for a different usage, relieving muscle spasms associated with multiple sclerosis. In addition to exploring new applications for Sativex, the company is developing drugs with different cannabis formulations.

FDA approval would represent an important milestone in the nation's often uneasy relationship with marijuana, which 16 states and the District of Columbia already allow residents to use legally with doctors' recommendations. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration categorizes pot as a dangerous drug with no medical value, but the availability of a chemically similar prescription drug could increase pressure on the federal government to revisit its position and encourage other drug companies to follow in GW Pharma's footsteps.

Doctors and multiple sclerosis patients are cautiously optimistic about Sativex. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society has not endorsed marijuana use by patients, but the organization is sponsoring a study by a University of California, Davis neurologist to determine how smoking marijuana compares to Marinol in addressing painful muscle spasms.

Opponents and supporters of crude marijuana's effectiveness generally agree that more research is needed. And marijuana advocates fear that the government will use any new prescription products to justify a continued prohibition on marijuana use. .

Source: US Today