Medical Marijuana Gets a Promotion from Home to Hospital at a California Facility

Although medical marijuana has been allowed in California since 1996, common sense will tell you that patients have used it at home, not in hospitals. After all, notwithstanding the state sanction for drug when recommended by a physician, cannabis is still illegal at the federal level, categorized as a Schedule I substance (a with heroin and LSD)…and therefore, possession of it is subject to criminal prosecution.

So it doesn't take a leap to understand why medical marijuana isn't on the medication cart when staff make the rounds.

However, change is afoot in one California hospital: Marin General Hospital in Greenbrae. And if Marin General's mindset is a indicator of the climate to come, there may be more change ahead.

Earlier this month, the board of Marin Healthcare District (which owns the 173-bed hospital) approved a resolution that will ha staff study the clinical use of medical cannabis, thereby beginning a process that would allow open medical marijuana use in t hospital—specifically in the edible form.

Families helping patients manage symptoms with cannabis? Providers don't ask and don't tell…

Dr. Larry Bedard is the Marin Healthcare District board member and retired emergency physician who introduced the resolutio He says that family members sometimes bring edible medical marijuana to patients, but hospital staff have kept to a "don't as don't tell policy" and simply don't acknowledge it.

Bedard understands the reason for the trepidation around California hospitals openly allowing medical marijuana use; the loo federal illegality of the drug is enough to scare away the best intentions.

"Hospitals are afraid the federal government will revoke their Medicare provider license," Bedard says.

California lags behind other states regarding this issue

Marin General may be the first hospital in the state to give the nod to open medical marijuana use, but California is not the firs state in the country to give that latitude to its medical facilities.

Connecticut treats this delicate issue by protecting staff from criminal prosecution when they allow patients access to medical marijuana, though the state does not necessarily allow hospital staff to administer medical cannabis to patients.

Maine has passed a law that specifically protects nurses from criminal punishment in the event they administer medical marijuana to patients who possess the requisite physician recommendation and paperwork.

Marin board urges medical cannabis education for its doctors

Bedard reports that because doctors' awareness regarding medical marijuana may be relatively limited, the Marin board has expressed its wish for hospital staff to receive education on the clinical use of cannabis. He further notes that physicians may be unfamiliar with the potency of the drug and how much to recommend.

Smoking, of course, is not permitted in hospitals. This is the reasoning behind the edible use of marijuana in facilities. Bedard suspects that the vapor form of the drug will also be allowed if the Marin board's plans are realized.

Slow down: Licensing ahead

California's Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act goes into effect on January 1, 2018, and will establish a comprehensive licensing system for the drug. The bill requires licenses for commercial cultivation, manufacture, retail sale, transport, distribution, delivery, and testing. Licenses must be approved at the state and local levels of government. Though the law went into effect in January of this year, the state had said it would require an additional two years to set up all of the agencies and systems the Act will require.

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