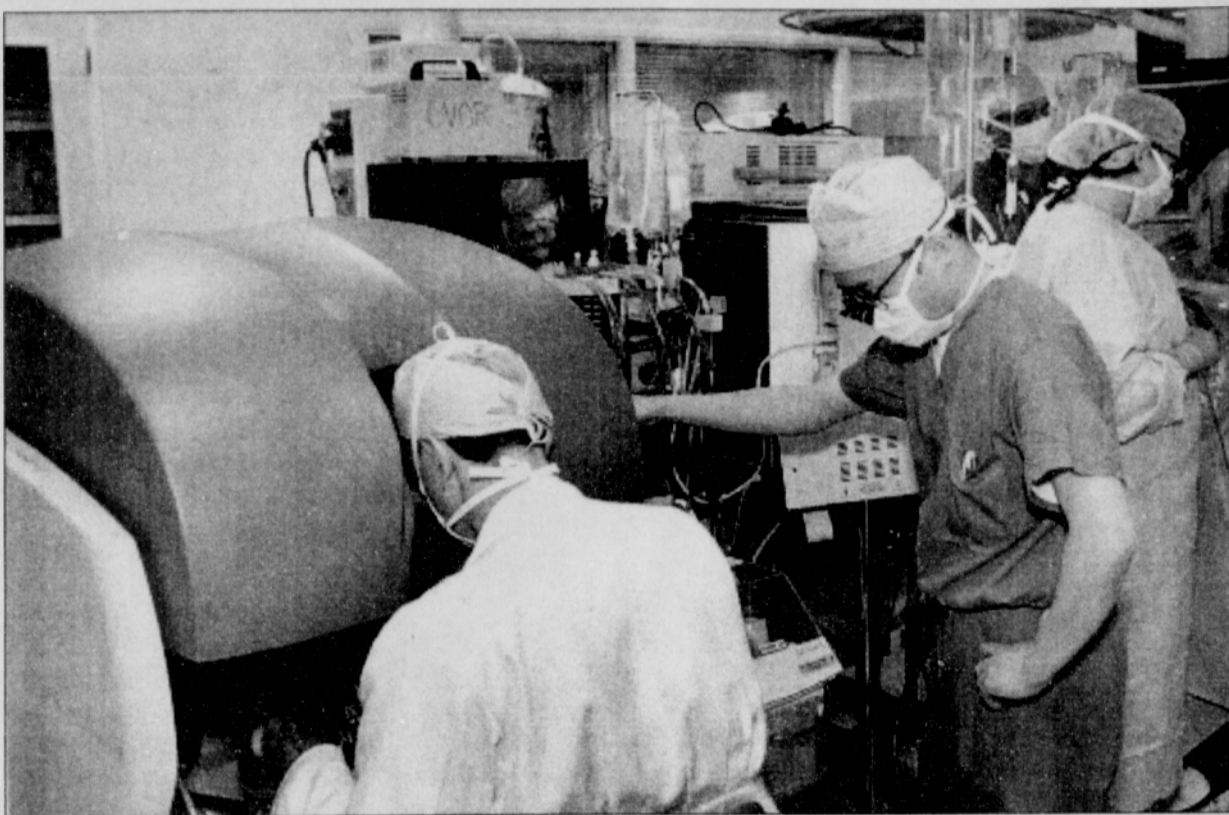




Health



Robotic Surgery Brings Research

Dr. Kenji Minakata of Japan (right) observes Dr. Jeff Swanson of Portland as he operates controls of a robotic-assisted and computer-assisted device during cardiac surgery at the Providence Heart Institute at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. The operation, the second of its kind at Providence, is part of a Food and Drug Administration study to adopt robotic surgery technology into the nation's healthcare system.

Supreme Court to Rule on Medical Marijuana

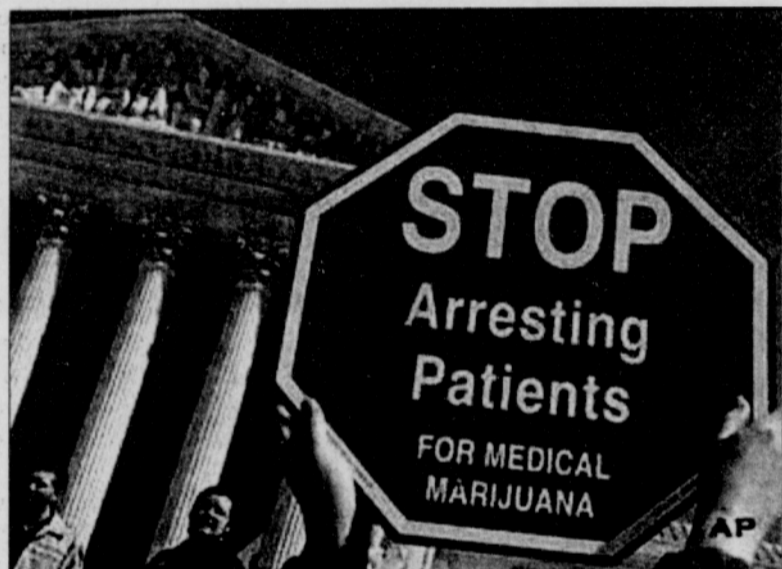
(AP) — Marijuana is an illegal drug, even if voters like the idea of using it in medical therapy, the federal government argued last week as the Supreme Court took a first look at the debate over prescription pot.

The court's watershed ruling, expected by June, likely would settle whether patients may get marijuana as a "medical necessity" even though

conservative Family Research Council said endorsing marijuana as therapy sends the wrong message to young people.

"Marijuana is not good medicine, to put it simply," he said.

A ruling against the club would mean the government could prosecute distributors aggressively in federal court, regardless of whether



The issue of legalizing marijuana for medical purposes draws protests.

it is an illegal drug under federal law.

A ruling for the Oakland Cannabis Buyers Cooperative would allow special marijuana clubs to resume distributing the drug in California, which passed one of the nation's first medical marijuana laws in 1996.

A ruling for the federal government would not negate the California voter initiative, but would effectively prevent clubs like Oakland's from distributing the drug.

Several justices seemed skeptical of the marijuana-as-medicine argument in general, and of the notion that marijuana distributors have what the club's lawyers call a medical-necessity defense in court.

As the debate unfolded inside, one woman carried a picket outside the courtroom depicting a red "Stop" sign.

It read: "Stop arresting patients for medical marijuana."

On the other side, Scott Rich of the

states have approved medical marijuana use.

That would force providers underground or out of business altogether, advocates of medical marijuana say. California Attorney General Bill Lockyer is backing the Oakland club, arguing that the state has the right to enforce its law allowing seriously ill patients to use marijuana.

Some patients and doctors say the drug relieves nausea, improves energy levels and helps combat the symptoms of ailments ranging from cancer to AIDS to glaucoma and multiple drug law by distributing, and in some cases growing, marijuana for medical use.

Voters in Alaska, Colorado, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington also have approved ballot initiatives allowing the use of medical marijuana. In Hawaii, a similar law was passed by the legislature and signed by the governor in June 2000.

Bill Would Allow Patients to Grow More Marijuana

(AP) - A bill introduced in the Oregon Legislature would allow medical marijuana patients to grow more plants, possess larger amounts of the drug and use it to treat any medical condition.

That's if their doctor, naturopath or nurse-practitioner thought it would help.

Former Rep. Jo Ann Bowman sponsored the bill, saying the proposal does only "minor tweaking" to Oregon's voter-approved medi-

cal marijuana law.

Oregon's Medical Marijuana Act was approved by voters in 1998. The law allows patients suffering from specific ailments and symptoms to grow and use marijuana, provided their doctor signs a chart note or a form provided by the state Health Division.

Patients who are unable to or don't want to grow their own plants may designate a caregiver to grow for them.


Mercury Thermometer Exchange Offered

Hi-School Pharmacies in the Portland-Vancouver area will accept mercury thermometers this month in exchange for earth-friendly, digital thermometers. Under terms of the exchange,

the stores will provide a digital thermometer with a \$5.99 retail value for the wholesales price of \$1.99.


The thermometers should be placed in hard containers such as the original

thermometer case, toothbrush holders, or a small plastic soda bottle with a screw-top lid. The container should then be sealed in a plastic bag before transporting it to the store.



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