San Francisco Examiner

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1992

Now that the FDA has said yes to MDMA research, it's your turn. MAPS membership information pages 34 – 35.

FDA gives approval to testing of Ecstasy

By Sarah Pekkanen
STATES NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — In an unprecedented decision, the Food and Drug Administration has cleared the way for a UC-Irvine researcher to study the effects of a hallucinogenic drug known as MDMA, or Ecstasy, on human subjects.

Dr. Charles Grob last week won FDA approval for his study, expected to take place at the campus in two months.

During Grob's study, six health professionals, who have not yet been selected, will take two low-level doses of the drug and a placebo during three separate sessions to determine the level for a noticeable effect of the drug.

The FDA approval is a major breakthrough for researchers who have, with few exceptions, been denied permission to administer hallucinogens, including LSD, to human subjects since officials moved to outlaw the drugs in the late 1960s.

Rick Doblin, president of a nonprofit organization called the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, said the subjects will be volunteers who all took Ecstasy before it was outlawed by the FDA in 1985.

The subjects have already assumed any risks associated with the drug, which may also have contributed to the FDA approval, Doblin said.

The six volunteers participating in the drug study will be subject to a battery of non-invasive tests, including mood status, analysis of pain reduction and cognitive tests, said Grob.

Grob still has two more hurdles to clear before his study can take place: He must win approval from the Drug Enforcement Administration and the California Research Advisory Panel. Doblin said he did not expect either agency to oppose the study.

The drug Ecstasy has been reported to increase self-confidence and self-acceptance and induce feelings of empathy and love, which could make it a useful tool for psychotherapists, some researchers say.

Although some negative side effects of the drug include decreased appetite and decreased desire to perform mental or physical tasks, the drug may also help alleviate pain, which could benefit certain terminally ill patients, Doblin said.

Grob said he hopes to eventually win FDA approval for a study that would involve administering the drug to end-stage cancer patients.