



Our Drug Addicts Need Real Treatment, Not Mouthpieces for Their Crack Pipes

by David Berner

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Would you cross the street to give a drunk a clean shot glass? Of course not.

But that only means you have better instincts and more common sense in your pinkie finger than all the geniuses in the Ministry of Health.

Yesterday, this newspaper headlined the news that free plastic mouthpieces are on the way for crack pipes and their users.

Apparently, all five provincial health authorities will participate in this giveaway.

The rationale is that this will stem the tide of hepatitis C -- spread, we are told, by sharing crack pipes.

The impetus for this bad policy, as it often is with harm-reduction strategies, is truly bad science.

It is based on one study in Toronto with 51 participants, in which the hepatitis virus was found on one pipe.

In Grade 9 chemistry, you'd get a D for work like this.

Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.'s chief medical officer, says that giving crack addicts clean mouthpieces will "introduce people to health care and addiction treatment services as well."

Really, doctor?

On Monday, I asked a long-time Burnaby RCMP officer about the availability of treatment options in his district for addicted youth.

His answer? "I don't know of any."

Wednesday's news follows fast on the story that the Vancouver Island Health Authority was gearing up to give entire crack-smoking kits for free to addicts in Duncan, Courtenay, Nanaimo and Campbell River.

And Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe has for many months been petitioning to open not one, but four safe-injection sites in his city. Further, he proposes that one of the sites be a mobile unit.

"Step right up! Shoot in comfort here!"

Are you familiar with the mobile cancer station driving through your neighbourhood? The Arthritis on Wheels program?

No?

That's because they don't exist, but the mayor of our capital city is shopping for a drive-by shooting gallery.

Perhaps your grandmother has diabetes. She has raised two generations of family, cleaned house, worked, paid taxes and taken the kids to ball games and ballet lessons.

Now she walks to the local pharmacy and, opening her change purse, pays for the needles she needs to inject her insulin.

Is the B.C. health ministry opening its little change purse to help grandma buy needles?

Crack pipes and crack kits, free needles, safe-injection sites, free heroin and substitute drugs are all tragically bad strategies.

I ran a residential treatment centre for addicts in two provinces for 10 years.

Hundreds and hundreds of addicts learned to live clean and sober lives. The program still flourishes in Manitoba.

I have lobbied for almost 40 years now for treatment and more treatment.

Later today, I will deliver a speech to a local Rotary Club on this exact subject.

Treatment is needed, not plastic filters.