

CONTROL OF DRUG ABUSE

The Minister of Health and Welfare, Mr. John C. Munro, announced to the House of Commons on February 24 governmental measures to control the abuse of methadone and the amphetamines. Part of his statement follows:

* * * *

Methadone is an opiate-type synthetic drug which has become widely used in the treatment of heroin addiction. During the last year, staff of my Department have received many reports of misuse and abuse of methadone. As a result of concern over misuse of this drug, the former Food and Drug Directorate of my Department and the Canadian Medical Association established a joint committee in 1970 to investigate the proper place of methadone in the care of narcotic addicts. Concern about the abuse of methadone also was raised by the LeDain Commission in its final report on treatment, which was submitted to the Government a few weeks ago.

As a result of the recommendations of the joint FDD-CMA committee and of the LeDain Commission, I have decided to restrict the availability of methadone in the following way: Physicians will be permitted to prescribe methadone only after they are authorized to do so by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Those so authorized will be considered to be qualified by reason of expertise and the availability of necessary facilities and ancillary services to utilize methadone effectively in the treatment of heroin abuse.

In line with the recommendations of the LeDain Commission, authorized physicians will be required to be associated with a specialized clinic. Requests for authorization will be considered by an expert advisory committee to be appointed by me in co-operation with the medical profession. I expect that necessary regulatory changes can be made and the methadone-control program instituted within a few weeks time. The program should be fully operational by June 1 of this year. In the meantime I call upon the physicians of Canada to utilize restraint in the use of methadone.

* * * *

AMPHETAMINES

Medical authorities are agreed that the legitimate medical uses of amphetamines are extremely limited. They have at best only a minor role in rational drug therapy, primarily for the treatment of two relatively rare and obscure disorders - narcolepsy and hyperkinesis in children.

As a result of my grave concern about the serious public health implications of amphetamine abuse, I have decided that the use of amphetamines and the related drugs, phenmetrazine and phendimetrazine, will be limited to treatment of only those

disorders for which they are indicated on medical grounds. Use of these drugs for treatment of obesity as so-called "diet pills" will no longer be permitted. Any physician wishing to prescribe amphetamines, phenmetrazine and phendimetrazine will be authorized by the Minister of National Health and Welfare to do so, provided he wishes to use the drugs for treatment of *bona fide* narcoleptics and hyperkinetic children. In co-operation with the Canadian Medical Association and L'Association des Médecins de Langue Française du Canada, a list of consulting physicians will be drawn up to aid in verification of the diagnosis of these relatively rare disorders.

* * * *

I am fully aware...that this action to control misuse of legally prescribed amphetamines does not directly affect use of these drugs by so-called "speed freaks", who obtain their drugs from illicit sources. Nevertheless, this action does indicate the serious light in which the Government views amphetamine abuse and should have marked effects on an important aspect of abuse of these drugs, that by adults who obtain their drugs on prescription.

* * * *

BOOKLET POPULAR

In January of this year, we invited parents and others receiving federal social assistance cheques to send for a free information booklet entitled *A Parent's Guide to Drug Abuse*. Public response to this offer has been most gratifying and, in fact, almost overwhelming. To date, nearly 500,000 requests for the booklet have been received by my Department and more especially by the directorate on the non-medical use of drugs.... This booklet is but the first in a continuing series of factual presentations on various aspects of drug abuse, aimed at providing the facts on this serious problem to Canadians as part of our over-all drug education program.

MORE PASSPORT OFFICES

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Mitchell Sharp, recently announced the opening of two more regional passport offices - one in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the other in Edmonton, Alberta - bringing to five the number of regional offices operating in major cities through which Canadians pass on their way abroad. Offices were opened in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver in 1970.

The regional offices are designed to give better passport service, particularly in emergency situations where applicants have sudden or unexpected travel plans, and to provide assistance to applicants who require advice on completing passport applications.