

Dr. Donald L. McNEIL (*Chairman of the Committee on Pharmacy of the Canadian Medical Association; member of the Drug Advisory Committee, Department of National Health and Welfare; President-elect of the Alberta Division of the C.M.A.*): Mr. Chairman, members of the committee on drugs and food contamination. The following is the brief and summary:

The Canadian Medical Association appreciates the opportunity of presenting views which we believe to be broadly representative of the opinions of Canadian doctors. My name is Donald L. McNeil and I practise in Calgary as senior physician in the department of internal medicine, Calgary associate clinic. I am chairman of the committee on pharmacy of the Canadian Medical Association, a member of the drug advisory committee, Department of National Health and Welfare and I was recently elected to the office of president-elect of the Alberta division of the C.M.A. I am accompanied by Dr. K. J. R. Wightman, professor of medicine, University of Toronto and former chairman of our committee on pharmacy and by Dr. A. D. Kelly, general secretary of The Canadian Medical Association.

We have studied your terms of reference and in this submission we will undertake to comment on those items which lie within our competence.

You are in the first instance asked to consider and report on the hazards of food contamination from insecticides, pesticides and other noxious substances. We know that potential hazards exist but we are not aware that the contamination of foodstuffs actually occurs to the degree that it constitutes a hazard to the health of the people. It is our understanding that at the meeting of this committee held during the last session of parliament you have studied and reported upon this portion of your remit and our remarks will consequently be brief and general. In the normal course of food preparation, processing and cooking it would appear that any residue of noxious substance is removed or inactivated and we are unable to identify the occurrence of disease or disability with potential contamination. It is a fact, however, that poisoning may occur by gross overdose of the chemicals which constitute the insecticides and pesticides used in agriculture and in domestic life. The ingestion or inhalation of such substances in substantial amount may produce poisoning in the operators who apply the chemicals and accidental poisoning in children may occur in the household. The experience of Poison Control Centres in Canada is that poisoning with insecticides and pesticides occurs many times less frequently than accidental poisoning with household remedies, cleaning fluids and detergents.

We do not minimize the potential dangers of residues of pesticides contaminating agricultural products and we are generally favourable to the regulations as they exist in this country. It is observable, however, that in certain instances provincial agricultural authorities enforce very stringent residual tolerances on the basis of evidence which does not appear to be related to any health hazard. The banning of the use of dieldrin and aldrin in certain jurisdictions is a case in point. The introduction of new chemical pesticides of unknown toxicity probably justifies an attitude of extreme caution but if the investigation of all possible toxic effects of D.D.T. had preceded its use, the control and eradication of malaria in many parts of the world would not have been possible.

The second portion of your terms of reference relates to the safety and cost of drugs and here your interest and ours are closely akin. The administration of drugs is an important element in medical practice and the medical profession desires to have available in the interests of patients the most efficacious, the safest and least costly remedies. The elaboration of specific remedies directed towards the alleviation of a recognizable pathological process or to the destruction or inactivation of a known micro-organism is a development of recent years. Safety in medication is a relative term and it should be recognized that the introduction of material into the human body is never without inherent risk, and our efforts should be directed towards minimizing the hazard.