

*Adjournment Debate*

This was disturbing news to many people, as insulin was discovered in 1921 by Toronto medical researchers, Frederick Banting and Charles Best. As we all know, Dr. Banting and Dr. MacLeod both received in 1923 the Nobel prize in medicine for this great work. What is also disturbing is that the Connaught Laboratories of the University of Toronto, now a subsidiary of the Canada Development Corporation, is virtually the sole Canadian manufacturer of insulin. In the past it has kept down the price of insulin.

In 1922 the cost of insulin was \$10 per 100 units, but was reduced to 25 cents per 100 units in 1941, and remained at about that level until approximately 1960. Since 1961, and especially since 1967, the cost of insulin has increased dramatically. Today the Ontario Parcost Comparative Drug Index quotes the price of \$6.70 for 100 international units of pork Toronto insulin. Of course, the price is much higher in certain private pharmacies in Toronto and neighbourhood.

● (1812)

What is also disturbing is we hear that the current feeding methods of livestock will result in lower yields of insulin from pancreas glands. More disturbing from the speech of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) on October 26 in this House is that Canada will be a net importer of pork this year because there is a reduced production of pork by 46 per cent in Canada. We are not self-sufficient in pork in our country. Therefore we will have to import pork. With the level of the Canadian dollar as it is, the price of pork pancreas will increase, as will the price of insulin.

This brings me to a disturbing question which many people are asking, not only diabetics but also diabetologists. Since we are going to see an increase in the price of insulin and specialty insulin preparations, we would like to know what Canada is preparing to do about this eventuality.

The United States is already making contingency plans to make sure they will not be caught with a shortage of pancreas glands. From some manufacturers we learn that it takes about 16 head of cattle plus 16 pigs to provide enough insulin for one diabetic for one year. As more and more diabetics are being diagnosed and require insulin, it looks as if demand for the pancreas glands will keep the prices up.

In view of the analysis of the situation that there is very little hope that prices will be controlled, especially from rising too high, and as we are not self-sufficient in pork, every effort should be made to find new ways to improve the production methods of insulin.

The government should investigate this disturbing news that we will probably be short of pork insulin in the future and that the cost of developing pork insulin and specialty insulin preparations will be high. That is why I hope the parliamentary secretary or the representative of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Robinson) will give us some assurance that the government is doing something about the problem of insulin production and insulin prices in Canada today and in the near future.

[Mr. Haidasz.]

**Mr. Maurice Harquail (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Urban Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I would be very curious to learn the source of the information placed before the House by the hon. member for Parkdale (Mr. Haidasz), as I am sure would be the Department of National Health and Welfare and possibly the Ministry of Agriculture, with regard to his statement that we are going to have a shortage of pork.

From time to time over the last two years, questions have been raised in the House and by the press relating to the availability and supply of materials for the production of the essential drug product insulin, needed by persons suffering from diabetes. Insulin, a naturally occurring hormone, is prepared from the pancreas glands of cattle and pigs, obtained at the packing plant level.

Let me first address the question of availability of animal pancreas. Until 1973, despite a ban on exports of beef pancreas, Canada was partially dependent on imports of pancreas glands and insulin to meet Canadian needs for insulin. Self-sufficiency was attained when collection procedures in packing plants were made more efficient and prices rose to world levels, thus encouraging more efficient collection.

Generally speaking, Canadian prices for pancreas glands are at par with U.S. prices which are decisive in determining the world price. Until 1973, Canadian insulin manufacturers paid less than the world price, and since then prices have increased up to the world market price. For the information of hon. members, the pancreas of beef and calves offer the most efficient yield of insulin; pork pancreas are one half to two thirds as efficient. The latter are not subject to export controls.

At the present time, I am informed, the total poundage of pancreas in storage is at historically high levels.

Questions have also been raised about the cost of insulin and its availability and reserve in Canada. Mr. Alun Davies, Executive Vice President of Connaught Laboratories Limited, the domestic producer of insulin, was contacted to determine if there was any potential for insulin shortage in Canada. He advised officers of the health protection branch of the department that current reserves of insulin are at an all time high and Connaught Laboratories Limited have an inventory which would supply all Canadian needs for a period of one to one and a half years, even if there was no more production of insulin at all.

● (1817)

As a result of increased production costs, the price of insulin rose some 10 to 12 per cent in each of the years 1975 and 1976. Increases in the price of pancreas and increased production costs necessitate a further 20 per cent increase in 1977. These increases in the price of insulin are not tied to any decrease in production or linked with the export of pancreas. I have just said that supplies of both pancreas and insulin are at levels ample to supply Canadian needs.

Permit me to remind hon. members that pork pancreas, which are not subject to export controls, are subject to wide price fluctuations on the world market and are less efficient