

*Narcotic Control Act***NARCOTIC CONTROL ACT**

AMENDMENT RESPECTING THERAPEUTIC USE OF HEROIN

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East) moved that Bill C-221, an Act to amend the Narcotic Control Act (therapeutic use of heroin), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill, as implied in the title, is to amend the Narcotic Control Act to allow for the therapeutic use of heroin by designated physicians, particularly those in cancer clinics, in order to help alleviate the pain and suffering of those who are terminally ill with cancer. There are 40,000 Canadians who die every year from this terrible disease. In my opinion, many of these suffer terribly and, in many cases, needlessly.

I cannot take credit for this Bill, although I do not hesitate not only to sponsor it but to embrace and support it totally. This Bill was introduced in the House on April 29, last year, by the late Hon. Walter Baker who was the distinguished Member of the House for Nepean-Carleton. He was a Member for 13 years.

He was prompted to introduce the Bill by a personal experience with cancer in his family. Somebody very close to him had contracted cancer and had been successful in overcoming it. But he saw at first hand the suffering that is associated with this dreaded disease and what happens in our cancer clinics. It is one of the tragic ironies that when he introduced the Bill on April 29, 1983, he thought he was in reasonably good health. Less than six months later, he was dead from cancer. He did not know that he had it at the time.

I suppose there is not a Member of the House who has not been touched either directly or indirectly through knowing someone who has had this dreadful terminal disease. Consequently, I suppose we can all speak about it with a certain amount of feeling. I do not understand why the laws of this compassionate nation do not allow for the medical use of heroin for those suffering people. That, of course, is the whole purpose of this exercise here today.

There are 37 countries in the world that do permit heroin to be used for medical purposes to help alleviate the pain and suffering of those who are terminally ill. I hope that the House today will either agree to second reading of my Bill, which is a very simple Bill, or at the very least agree to compromise and allow the subject matter of the Bill to be referred to committee. I anticipate the latter because there have been the usual consultations. I thank the House in anticipation of that, not for my own sake but out of respect for the memory of the late and distinguished Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton, my friend, the Hon. Walter Baker. That is what he wanted. He wanted the Bill to go to committee. He wanted to have at least the subject matter of the Bill go to committee so that Members could hear evidence and hear expert witnesses and come to a consensus on this very important matter.

There is a division of opinion among certain medical practitioners, but the consensus among those who are most closely identified with the suffering, that is, those selfless people in the

nursing profession, is that we should permit the medical use of heroin to ease the suffering of those who are terminally ill. I have not been able to find one nurse in this country who expresses any reservations whatsoever on this subject. Indeed, most of them are militant and ask why in the name of suffering humanity we do not permit the use of heroin, which is many more times effective in alleviating the suffering and pain identified with cancer.

I had a brother who died of cancer. I remember watching the terrible agony he went through before he died. That agony could not be alleviated by morphine or any of the other painkillers because his suffering had become so acute that he had passed the threshold. If they had increased the amount of morphine, it would have been fatal. However, if they had been permitted to give him heroin, his last days would have been more peaceful. There are many in this country who are in the same position.

When my late friend and distinguished colleague introduced this Bill, he quoted from a letter from a Dr. Colin D.B. Cunningham of the Queensway Carleton Hospital in the City of Nepean. I will not quote the entire letter but there is one very important point which he made. I quote the following from *Hansard* of July 1, 1983, at page 25937:

There is no other drug quite like heroin or as effective as heroin in suppressing pain and discomfort and I feel most strongly that it should be available as a prescription drug to alleviate the terrible pain and suffering of some late or terminal cancer patients and others.

There is also a syndicated column under the pen name of W. Gifford-Jones. The column is called "The Doctor Game". The person who writes that column is a distinguished physician by the name of Dr. Kenneth Walker. I want to quote from one of his columns. This is what he says about nurses:

They claim that nearly 100 per cent of their patients eventually receive heroin by injection. And that it would be cruel not to have heroin available when needed.

● (1710)

He is quoting here nurses he interviewed in Great Britain where the use of heroin is permitted for medical purposes. Then he goes on to cite a case of a 17 year-old girl terminally ill with bone cancer who was suffering dreadfully. This girl was given 1,700 milligrams of heroin every four hours—five milligrams is the average dose for postoperative pain. The doctor said:

It would have been impossible to control her pain without heroin. You simply couldn't inject such a huge dose if you were using morphine.

Other instances are cited. I believe that we have an obligation to the suffering people of this country who are terminally ill with cancer. I fail to understand why we cannot amend the Narcotic Control Act to permit doctors, designated physicians and nurses in designated cancer clinics, to apply this pain-killing drug which is so much more effective than the drugs now in use.

I do not profess to be an expert. I am merely putting forth a layman's opinion. But I believe that we, as Members of Parliament, are entitled to determine whether or not the case