



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR MERRIMAC

Hansard 2 March 2000

RETRACTABLE NEEDLES

Mr QUINN (Merrimac—LP) (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.25 p.m.) Tonight I rise to support the motion of the member for Maroochydore. Interestingly, we have heard another excuse from the Minister for Health. Previously, the excuses seem to have focused on the cost involved in moving to retractable syringes. Tonight she demonstrated the various types of syringes. The Minister should be looking at what the international agencies are saying about this. The World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent have all signed an agreement to move to retractable syringes over the next three years. They believe that what is currently available fits the bill. Yet the Queensland Minister for Health is going in the opposite direction. She has another excuse every day. Tomorrow she will give us another reason why we cannot do this.

I wanted to contribute to this debate because people have come to my office and sat opposite me as they outlined their story of how they became victims of needle-stick injuries. There is a needle exchange program in my electorate. A father told me that, when his young daughter was playing in a park near the needle exchange, she accidentally put her hand on a needle and suffered a needle-stick injury. Over the three to six months that followed that incident, the family experienced trauma while wondering what the future held for their daughter. That would be the worst experience that any parent could go through. That family shattered under the strain of that three to six-month wait. Unfortunately, they ended up being divorced. Another person came into my office and told me that, while walking along the beach, he stood on a discarded syringe. He experienced similar trauma and his family almost suffered the same fate as the family I just mentioned.

This is not simply about dollars and cents. This issue strikes at the hearts of families in a very real way. I wish to read a section of a letter sent to one of my constituents who suffered a needle-stick injury. A similar letter is sent to all people who complain about discarded syringes in the community. The second paragraph states—

"The unsafe disposal of used syringes in public places is a great concern. I was alarmed to read about needle stick injuries recently sustained by a young child as well as yourself at Miami Beach."

If we are alarmed, we ought to be doing something about it. We ought not allow this situation to continue. Cost ought not come into it. The most appalling thing we heard in this debate was the Minister's statement that a certain type of syringe costs 14c and others cost 50c, 60c or a dollar. I do not care how much they cost. If they work, they should be brought in.

Ms Struthers: Do they work?

Mr QUINN: Strangely, international agencies say they work. If it can be done in other parts of world, it can be done here. It is not about dollars and cents, it is about protecting families and keeping them together. Until the Minister realises this, she will always fall back on the old complaint about there not being enough dollars and cents. This is a department with a budget of billions of dollars. Surely it can find an extra \$10m to do this properly. If the Government is going to have needle exchange programs, it should do it properly because if this problem continues support for needle exchange programs will ebb away very quickly as it is in my electorate now. It is hard to find people in the Nobby Beach area, where the needle exchange is located, who, because of this factor, support the needle

exchange. If the Government thinks that needle exchanges are a way of reducing communicable diseases among intravenous drug users and it wants to go down that path of harm minimisation, then it should put in place measures that will protect innocent people. The vast majority of people cannot understand why their life is being shattered by an activity which is illegal, and they are becoming the innocent victims of it. So there is one group of people indulging in illegal activities and forcing other groups of people to bear the cost, and the cost is too high. We need to move on this as quickly as possible. We ought not be worried about dollars and cents and we ought not be—

Time expired.

This is a department with a budget of billions of dollars. Surely it can find an extra \$10m to do this properly. If the Government is going to have needle exchange programs, it should do it properly because if this continues support for needle exchange programs will ebb away very quickly as they are doing in my electorate now. It is hard to find people in the Nobby Beach area, where the needle exchange is located, who support the needle exchange because of this factor. If the Government thinks that needle exchanges are a way of reducing communicable diseases among those intravenous drug users and it wants to go down that path of harm minimisation, then it should put in place measures that will protect innocent people. The vast majority of people cannot understand why their life is being shattered by an activity which is illegal, and they are becoming the innocent victims of this. So there is one group of people indulging in illegal activities, forcing other groups of people to bear the cost, and the cost is too high. We need to move on this as quickly as possible. We ought not be worried about dollars and cents and we ought not be—

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