



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
BEANLAND**

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

Hansard 2 March 2000

RETRACTABLE NEEDLES

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (6.46 p.m.): I rise to support the original motion and oppose the Government's amendment. What the Minister for Health has asked us to do in relation to this is give her the opportunity of putting this whole issue on the never-never. There is no time frame whatsoever mentioned in her amendment. The Minister simply will not give an undertaking to the people of Queensland of positive action on retractable needles.

The big issue today is of drug addicts going to parks, beaches, schoolyards and churchyards for the purposes of injecting drugs. We have heard of a number of instances of that. The disposal of thousands of needles in those areas by drug users increases the possibility of needle-stick injury. It is easy for members opposite to say that there is no evidence of that, as the member for Chermside just did. But how would he feel if his child came home with a needle-stick injury? What would he have to say about the Government's callousness?

All we get from the Minister is intemperate language. The Minister gets into a fluster on the whole issue, as she has done from day one when this matter was first raised. The Minister's original excuse, as reported on 4BC, was that—

"... there's another problem with retractable needles and why it would lead to a huge increase in the number of needles being distributed, is we know, unfortunately, that and we would try to avoid this, but unfortunately about twenty-five per cent of users still share needles."

Minister, I thought that that was what the needle exchange idea was all about, that is, to stop these people from sharing needles. If some 25% of drug users are still sharing needles, that is another good reason why this matter should be attended to and attended to urgently. All we have heard from this Minister, though, is to fob it off for another day. This is the can't do Labor Government. Time and time again Ministers come into this Chamber and blame the Federal Government—blame anybody, as long as they do not blame themselves. They have even tried to blame the previous Government, even though Labor has been in office for most of the 1990s. They have blamed everyone but themselves. This is the can't do Labor Government. Nowhere is it more evident than in this instance.

If we look at the facts put forward from this side of the Chamber, there is mounting evidence to show that there is a range of choices as far as retractable needles are concerned, and more are coming on to the market. No wonder there is concern in the community when the Minister herself admits that syringe use is going to almost double in the next 12 months to two years. We have heard from the Minister's own mouth that the number is going to double. That is what the Minister had to say when she was commenting on this issue in the daily press.

The Minister has used the issue of cost. She has already been shot out of the water in relation to that. The Minister knew that the cost issue would not stand up, and she has now moved on to something else. This is typical of what we get from this can't do Government. Mr Speaker, you know that that is the case because it is not doing your electorate of Redcliffe any good. People cannot walk on the beaches at Redcliffe without the fear of needle-stick injury. People cannot walk on the beaches anywhere in Queensland because of that fear. Those opposite should ask the parents out there. They

will very rapidly tell members what the situation is. I get churchmen and a range of other people coming to me to complain about this issue week in and week out. That is the fact of the matter. This Minister knows it, but she has not done anything about it.

The Minister simply is not up to tackling this matter and taking some positive action in regard to it. Of course the issue of cost is irrelevant at the end of the day, because no matter what it costs—and the costs are not through the roof—we ought to be tackling this issue head-on to ensure it is resolved so that people can once again enjoy the wonders of this great State of ours without having to put up with this risk.

The Federal Government has committed over \$500m to achieving a drug-free society. But the reason there are so many needles in the community is harm minimisation. It has failed. Instead of having the goal of a drug-free society, we have had harm minimisation. Long-term harm minimisation programs have been in place and are still operating in our community. Because of that policy, we are experiencing this huge growth in the number of syringes. Of course, if we were really getting people off drugs, the number of needles would not be escalating in this manner; nor would we have the very high level—25%—of users reusing needles. In a long-term sense the Government has failed in this regard. There is no point in going out there in the community—

Time expired.
