



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 2 March 2000

RETRACTABLE NEEDLES

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (10.03 a.m.): Babies being born with hepatitis C are doomed to a life of disease and stigma, and it is happening here in Queensland. Up to 16% of babies born to a hepatitis C positive mother will contract the disease. It is not their fault that their drug injecting mother shared a dirty needle. The horror of liver failure, cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer and death that can result from hepatitis C, a disease more contagious than HIV/AIDS, is one of the main reasons that we support the needle availability program to provide clean needles to IV drug users.

I wish to table a letter from the President of the Toowoomba and Darling Downs Local Medical Association, Dr John Cox, who calls for retractable needles to be introduced to stop needle sharing. This is coalition policy, and we are calling on the Government to follow. Dr Cox says—

"From a community point of view, the social costs and the ongoing uses of medical facilities as a result of being Hepatitis C positive is enormous. They grossly outweigh any cost that may be associated by having a more expensive delivery system, which is safe and not able to be transferred between people."

He also talks about the stigma of a child being born with hepatitis C. That is why I am so horrified that the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, refused to consider retractable needles when talking on 4BC radio last week because she said that it would increase the number of needles used as people would not be able to share needles any more. I table that radio transcript. Her admission that 25% of people on needle programs share needles is an indictment. The Government's target should be 100% no reuse, as that is the point of the program. The Minister said—

"... 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.

With a retractable needle that would mean they couldn't and therefore while there was a safety benefit on it, the number of needles distributed going out would have to increase by twenty-five per cent ..."

I say to the Minister that that is the whole point: she should be introducing a system which has zero reuse. That is the recommendation of the World Health Organisation.

Time expired.
