



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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ALCOHOLISM

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): We are all aware of the consequences of the recent terrorist attacks and their devastating social impact, but today I wish to draw to the attention of the House another worldwide problem that has affected millions of people, both directly and indirectly, but, sadly, one that is much easier to turn a blind eye to.

Statistics show that alcoholism is a steadily growing problem in all communities and that the age limit of those with a drinking problem is decreasing. Statistics also indicate that 45 per cent of road deaths are caused by alcohol. We can estimate the cost to the community in terms of the health system and police, but what statistics will never show entirely is the damage done to others in the form of abuse and neglect caused by alcoholism.

No doubt some in this room here today have been affected to some degree by alcoholism, whether it be related to a friend, acquaintance or even someone closer. I know that I have had some concerns about more than one of my friends and their heavy drinking habits. But as we all know, alcohol is a legal drug. Because of its legality it appears to be acceptable. If people drink and do it well they may be socially accepted, at least initially. A drunken state can be seen as humorous. A drunk is often seen as the life of the party. To begin with it is not seen as a problem. Of course, the one with the drinking problem will be the last person to admit it.

The legal drugs of alcohol, nicotine and prescription drugs are the three biggest killers in the Western World. Over 500 people each week die from illnesses relating to them, yet this situation does not make headlines. Why? It is probably because the substances connected to the deaths are legal. Any drug overdose death caused by heroin has a much higher chance of getting in the papers than does a death caused by lung cancer, heart attack or kidney failure resulting from the abuse of legal drugs. Why? It is probably because heroin is illegal.

People who become addicted to any drug need help, and it is available. But those who want help need to seek it. One major voluntary group helping people world wide with a drinking problem is Alcoholics Anonymous. For years AA has affirmed and strengthened a tradition of being fully self-supporting and of neither seeking nor accepting contributions from non-members. AA's aim, once a person decides to give up drinking, is to provide support to help that person lead a normal and productive life free of alcohol, one day at a time. Sobriety is maintained through sharing common experiences at monthly group meetings and through the suggested 12 steps for recovery from alcoholism, which are well documented in AA literature. Its brochure states in part—

AA is a fellowship of men and women who share their experiences, strengths and hopes with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

Alcoholism is an illness and must be treated as such. It does not discriminate between young or old, black or white, rich or poor. I was honoured to be invited to a local AA meeting recently as guest speaker. Although I was a stranger, members freely shared with me their stories with frankness and honesty. It takes guts and courage to admit that your last drink was of kerosene.

I was told that you never forget your first AA meeting, and I can assure members here that I certainly will not forget mine—not because of any memorable speech I made but, sadly, because Brian Thomas Deecke, a well-respected member of AA, passed away moments after he and I shared some light chatter after the meeting. Brian is a devastating loss both to his family and to AA. He was the editor of the AA's prominent monthly Queensland booklet titled 'Your Pathfinder', to which he dedicated

many hours. He was a sponsor to a number of the AA members and was always there when they needed support. As one sponsee put it—

Brian was a man who lived by being responsible for the sick alcoholic who came to AA for help.

People will remember him because of his friendly disposition, his dedication and commitment to his family and AA members. Brian's eulogy read in part—

If you are feeling sorry for me 2 days after my death, then you are only feeling sorry for yourself.

Brian is survived by his wife, Ronnie, her two children, Mark and Rebecca, and their daughter, Jacinta, and his two children, David and Lyn, and their six children. For those members who are interested, AA has a 24-hour hotline on 3255 9162.
