

Safe Injection Sites for Drug Users

What is puzzling about the safe drug injection sites controversy is that many of the same people who are supportive of municipal drug injection sites are adamant in upholding bans on smoking not only in public buildings, offices and restaurants, but also in smoking lounges, open patios, and even in private cars. Such a dichotomy of thought is surprising where health issues are concerned. On the one hand, in citing health concerns, federal advertising regulations, provincial laws, and municipal bye-laws are being promulgated and rigidly enforced against citizens who want simply to enjoy a casual smoke; and, on the other hand, the criminal law is being suspended to cater to hard-drug users who are totally destroying their health and supporting their drug habits by engaging in criminal activities.

Tobacco is not a banned drug; cigarettes are sold legally in corner stores; they are heavily taxed, and most smokers are law-abiding citizens. Yet tobacco companies who manufacture and sell cigarettes are forced to carry warnings on their packaging that ‘Smoking can cause Cancer’ with ghoulish photos of individuals ravaged by cancer due to smoking. Now, the federal department of health, Health Canada, has in contemplation labelling regulations that will require even more explicit warnings that smoking ‘can cause’ colorectal and stomach cancers, oral diseases, damage to blood vessels, and even erectile dysfunction, with the warnings to be accompanied by even more graphic photos of the ravages of the various types of cancers on real sufferers. Everywhere smoking is stigmatized, and smokers are ostracized in being forced to go outdoors during work hours in the most inclement weather where they risk colds, or even pneumonia, for the simple pleasure of smoking a cigarette or to satisfy a momentary craving for nicotine.

No compromise is offered smokers, as the hospitality service industry is not allowed to provide smoking rooms, no matter how well ventilated and isolated to preclude non-smokers from being exposed to second-hand smoke. A number of years ago, Tim Horton’s had a well-ventilated, glassed-in smoking area where, after picking up a coffee, smokers could sit and enjoy a smoke with their coffee. Yet, our governments in a series of laws, enacted over the past decade, have put an end to that simple pleasure by banning smoking outright in enclosed areas, and even on ‘specifically-designed’ outdoor patios. Why the zealous, vindictive, campaign against our fellow citizens who want to enjoy a casual smoke and are willing to do so in designated enclosed smoking areas and open patios separated from non-smokers?

Casual smoking does not destroy one’s health. What has been established beyond dispute is that heavy smoking, or a long exposure to second-hand smoke, greatly increases – by a factor ten to twenty times – the risk of getting lung cancer or other respiratory diseases, and/or a cardiovascular disease, and brings a high risk of a premature death. One might as well say that heavy alcohol use will cause cirrhosis of the liver and premature death, and forbid people to drink alcohol in restaurants and drinking establishments. Yet, although the abuse of alcohol can cause severe health problems, and death, no one is calling – at least not since the abysmal failure of Prohibition – for the banning of the consumption of alcohol. Citizens are allowed to drink alcohol in moderation without running afoul of the law so why the persistent campaign to totally eradicate any and all smoking?

What is even more absurd is the current zeal on the part of social activists to establish safe injection sites for intravenous drug users. Unlike smokers, heavy drug users are not contributing members of society, most do not hold jobs, and they do not pay taxes on the illicit drugs that they consume. Drug addicts are engaging in an illegal activity in purchasing their drug of choice; and what is worse most heavy drug users beg, rob and steal, and/or prostitute themselves to pay for their drugs. The money that they pay for their illicit drugs supports organized crime, promotes violence, beatings, and killings on our streets --both within and without the drug culture – and puts a terrible strain on our law enforcement system. Drug use totally destroys families, as well the well-being, health, and eventually the life of the drug user. Moreover, individuals who are addicted to hard drugs impose a heavy strain on our medical health resources, and a huge financial cost on our health care system.

Despite the almost totally negative impact of hard drug use, Canadians are being told by our social service agencies that safe injection sites, by providing clean needles, will greatly reduce the health risk to drug addicts. In doing so, it will reduce a heavy burden on our health care system, and the great expense in treating drug addicts for a wide variety of debilitating health problems. In effect, we are told that we have to save drug addicts from the ill-effects of their irresponsible behaviour.

In addition, we are told that the medical personnel at safe injection sites are not to do anything to disparage drug use, as such efforts might discourage the addicts from turning up to inject their daily fix. The walls of the proposed safe injection sites will not be covered with photos of emaciated drug users with needles sticking out of their arms. Nor will the addicts be provided with literature setting forth the ill-effects of drug use, or with graphic photos of the ravages of drug use. Nor will they be reprimanded for engaging in a drug use that will destroy their health.

Unlike smokers, who are being lectured, publicly disparaged, and treated with disdain by our governments and social service agencies, hard-drug addicts, who do terrible damage to themselves and society, are to be made welcome at safe injection sites. They are to be provided with a safe and hygienic place to inject their illegal drugs and supplied with clean needles. The safe injection sites are intended to be places where drug addicts will receive a good deal of compassion and concern, and medical attention to enable them to continue to destroy their health and to rob, steal, beg and prostitute themselves to pay for their next fix. It's a ludicrous situation where hard-drug addicts are to be enabled by government and society to live a life of crime, and the criminal laws are to be suspended while they indulge in an illicit activity.

Today, decent working people are being harassed, treated with disdain, and denied the right to enjoy a casual smoke almost everywhere, bars are forbidden to have a smoking lounge – no matter how well ventilated – or even an outdoor smoking patio; yet, hard-drug addicts who prey on society through criminal activity, engage in an illegal activity that totally destroys their health, and inflict a great deal of harm and violence on the persons and property of others, are to be welcomed at drug injection sites financed by public tax dollars. Safe injection sites do not aid addicts to overcome their addiction, they simply enable addicts to continue to live a criminal life of drug abuse.

Many Canadians are wondering why casual smokers are being disparaged and harassed with laws aimed at changing their behavior, while our criminal laws are not being enforced against hard-drug users to change their behaviour. Why are those who are perpetually engaged in a criminal activity being catered to by our health agencies and governments? Why is there an acceptance of illicit hard drug use, with an overriding concern to reduce the health risk to heavy drug users who continue to engage in illegal activities, and a concomitant lack of concern for the security, safety, and well-being of Canadians living in drug-infested communities, and for the rule of law and equality before the law? It would be far better to prosecute hard-drug users for the crimes that they commit, and to sentence them to incarceration in prison hospitals where they can be weaned off drugs, have their health restored, and be provided with counselling, to facilitate their eventual reintegration into society as responsible citizens.

Passrob
July 2018