

Dr. Ronald Joe, MD

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, K1A 0A2

8 July 2006

Dear Prime Minister:

I am medical doctor, of Chinese ancestry, and I am writing to urge you to provide the Federal exemption that is required for the continuation of the efficacious and effective life saving work of Vancouver's Supervised Injection Facility. For many years, I have been a primary care physician with a diverse practice, including some of the hardest to treat patients, those living with active addictions that are not amenable to conventional treatments. Besides having my own private practice, I assist the College of Physicians in assessments of physicians in practice and I am currently in the field of information technology. I have worked in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for a number of years where the Safe Injection Site is located.

This healthcare program and the services around it including needle exchange, have in my view unquestionably, saved the lives many of our most at risk citizens. Without it, numerous human lives, including people that I have known in my practice, would have been needlessly lost to fatal overdoses or died of preventable infectious diseases like AIDS.

I have dedicated my life to providing old-fashioned "cradle to grave" healthcare practice and I have always considered the practice of medicine a privilege. Just as I have impacted the lives of my patients, they, too, have made a lasting impression on me. Even people with the most advanced of addiction, were once newborn babies that were born to parents whose lives were changed by their arrival. I have been there when helpless newborns have taken their first breath and I can tell you that every life is precious. As I near the autumn of my practice, I can tell you that the patients that struggle with addiction are no less valuable to me and I believe that they are no less valuable to Canadians.

In my work visiting the most vulnerable of people, struggling to live a hopeful life in their tiny hotel rooms in the inner city, I have come to understand that we must, whether we are policy makers or clinicians, meet people where they are today and not where we would want them to be. The supervised injection facility does not "give in to addiction" in any way; it is a social investment in the most vulnerable. This program creates an opportunity for people to be on the threshold of a successful life, by keeping them alive to live another day. I have seen people from all walks of life, all social classes, affected by addiction. No family is immune. As a father, I can only hope that none of my children ever falls victim to addiction. But, if they do, I would want a safe injection facility to exist, so that they could live to see another hopeful day and, one day, be able to live the life that I have hoped for them when they came into this world, with all my heart.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Ronald Joe, MD