

The Daily News

Duelling Pens: Each Tuesday editorial staff at the Daily News take turns to engage one another in a debate on a hot topic. The debates are intended to explore both sides of each issue and arguments expressed here will not always be the opinion of the duelling columnist -- sometimes they will just have drawn the short straw.

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TODAY'S TOPIC

Given that needles have been found in school zones and in children's play areas, and that drug use is an issue on the North Coast, should Prince Rupert consider a **safe injection site**?

PATRICK WITWICKI

"I've seen the needle and the damage done ..."

-- excerpt taken from Needle and the Damage Done, Neil Young, circa 1972.

Heroin kills. There is no p.c. way of putting this -- junkies die, drug-users, including extremely rich rock stars (thus Young's inspiration for his 1972 classic), overdose.

Prince Rupert is no different than any other city when it comes to people who overdose on drugs. Ask any cop, nurse, or anyone else for that matter, and they'll probably be able to show you (if allowed) the list of overdosed patients they treat on a monthly basis.

So I fail to see the good of providing an injection site for these aforementioned drug users, aside from ensuring that the RCMP and doctors in this town are overworked.

The arguments that will be pitched include the fact that this would cut down on the piles of needles that around town, and would also cut down on spreading needle-related diseases, like HIV. But centralizing a drug problem doesn't eliminate, or even decrease it. Ask anyone in Vancouver how the needle injection sites have worked down there.

The problems in their downtown eastside haven't decreased, and it could be argued that the situation is even worse than before the so-called **safe injection** sites came into existence.

If Rupert somehow gets some funding to deal with this problem, the only plan in motion should be to try and help these people get over their addiction, not offering a helping hand to add yet another track mark to someone's arm.

JAMES VASSALLO

In the history of the world, not once has the prohibition of a vice -- sex, drugs or alcohol -- ever worked.

In fact, in all those cases prohibition has made things worse. Alcohol prohibition in the U.S. led to the rise of organized crime, modern-day drug prohibition has filled jails and done nothing to impact user

rates, and bans on prostitution have compromised the safety of sex-trade workers to the point where the Robert Pickton's of the world can operate undetected for decades. For that reason alone, there is a compelling reason to support a **safe injection site** in Prince Rupert -- it doesn't exacerbate an already large problem.

The fact of the matter is that some people on the street are going to need to use needles to either inject legal or illegal drugs.

The Law and Order approach is not going to stem that tide and it takes away from the myriad of other tasks the public want police to look after, from break and enters to assaults.

It also forces people without a place to use their needles to inadvertently put the public in danger, as they choose wooded lots behind homes, near playgrounds or schools.

However, a **safe injection site** provides a contact for public health professionals to ensure users have clean needles that are disposed of safely, have medical care if needed and access to other basic services like the food bank.

A safe site makes sure those who use needles outside are not a danger to the public or themselves.

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