

THE VANCOUVER SUN

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THE NEWSPAPER'S VIEW

New study showing Insite's role in getting addicts into treatment should silence critics

As the evidence mounts, it's becoming harder and harder for detractors to condemn Insite, Vancouver's supervised injection facility.

We already knew, thanks to studies published in the world's top peer-reviewed medical and scientific journals, that the site is associated with many positive outcomes: Insite has been attracting the most high risk users, has helped quell public disorder and has reduced needle sharing.

Despite all of this positive evidence, detractors have continued accusing Insite of "facilitating" drug use, and have argued that it doesn't help people to get off drugs. Now, with the latest study by researchers at the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, published in the current issue of the top-ranked substance abuse journal *Addiction*, it's time to put those objections to rest.

The study built on a previous paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which found that regular use of Insite and contact with Insite's addiction counsellor were each independently associated with entry into residential detoxification programs.

The study begins by noting that the number of individuals entering detox rose 30 per cent in the year following Insite's opening. Researchers then assessed a random group of 1,031 individuals who used Insite, and found that entry into detox was associated independently with entry into methadone maintenance and other addiction treatment programs.

This suggests that Insite is helping to get people into long-term treatment, thereby reducing or ending their drug use. And many of the people Insite helps are, as the study's authors note, "extremely difficult to reach with conventional treatment strategies."

This study also puts a lie to the claim that Insite facilitates drug use

since, for some people at least, it seems to be doing the exact opposite. Insite is therefore not only a powerful harm-reduction measure, but is also an important adjunct to treatment.

This in turn means that the Conservative government, which is due to release its anti-drug strategy next week, no longer has a valid objection to Insite or to developing supervised injection facilities elsewhere across the country.

After all, when Health Minister Tony Clement last year announced the deferral of the decision to extend Insite's exemption to operate, he said, "Do safe injection sites contribute to lowering drug use and fighting addiction? ... Given the need for more facts, I am unable to approve the current request to extend the Vancouver site for another three-and-a-half years."

Now Clement has more facts, as the *Addiction* study answers his two questions in the affirmative. So he has no reason not to extend Insite's life, and to ensure that supervised injection facilities (SIFs) form an integral part of the government's anti-drug strategy.

Or as University of California San Diego Medical School professors Stefanie Strathdee and Robin Pollini put it in an *Addiction* editorial accompanying the study:

"It is time for politicians who oppose SIFs on the grounds that more research is needed to be honest with their constituents: it is lack of political will, not lack of data, that is keeping these life-saving public health services out of the hands of drug-dependent citizens."



Tony Clement

Base Parliament's makeup on population, not politics

The simple notion of representation by population has always been compromised in Canada by regional interests.

Instead of a simple mathematical equation that assigns seats in Parliament based on the number of people who live in each province, the way power is shared is warped by politics and history.

Since before Confederation, lawmakers in Ottawa have been trying to maintain a fair balance between numerical equivalency and historic regional interests as provinces have been added and populations waxed and waned.

Generally speaking, the changes have favoured the interests of regions that have fallen behind at the expense of those with higher growth. Based on population, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces have retained more clout than they deserve while Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia are under-represented.

The last adjustments to the formula were made more than 20 years ago. Compared to some previous versions, the Representative Act of 1985 adopted by Parliament had relatively few exceptions to the simple math. But those exceptions — the clause that says no province shall have fewer members of Parliament than it does senators and the clause that guarantees provinces will not lose seats — have continued to erode the notion of representation by population.

Currently, only three provinces — B.C., Alberta and Ontario — do not gain seats as a result of one of the clauses. That means all the other provinces have more MPs than B.C. has on the basis of population.

On a per capita basis, Prince

Edward Island benefits the most. In total number of extra seats, Quebec has been the big winner with seven more than it deserves.

The Conservative government's latest attempt to rebalance the House of Commons, Bill C-56, which was given first reading earlier this month, should allow B.C. and Alberta to maintain relatively the same clout we have now as our populations grow.

It also pulls Quebec back closer to the level it deserves, much to the chagrin of the Bloc Quebecois, which argues that fair treatment is not good enough for its province.

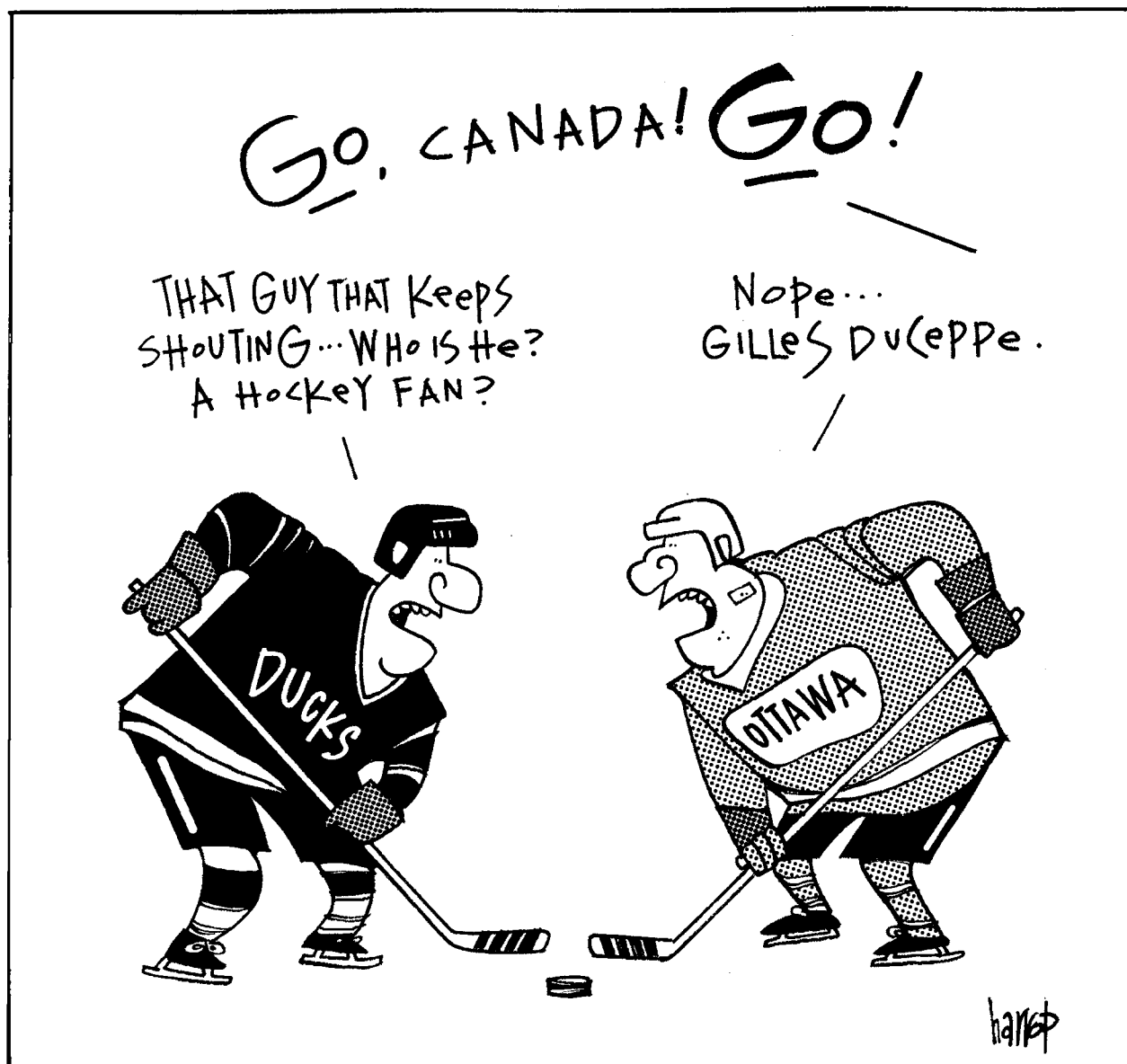
But the projections done by the Ontario government show it will fall increasingly farther behind. While the view from here is that Ontario has unfairly dominated Canada since Confederation, we cannot in all fairness demand equity for ourselves based on population while ignoring the same principle for others.

Conservative House Leader Peter Van Loan says that, even though Ontario will have only about 35 per cent of the seats and 39 per cent of the population by 2011, it will still be better off under the new formula than it would under the existing regimen.

That argument is beside the point. If the government is going to address the deficiencies in the 1985 formula, it should address them all. The simplest way is to cut further into the historical advantage given to the Atlantic provinces. Why should P.E.I. have four seats for a population half the size of the city of Victoria?

The Atlantic provinces will no doubt howl. But in governing for the future, we need to recognize Canada for what it has become, not what it was.

GRAHAM HARROP'S VIEWPOINT



VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Drivers treated injured dog like garbage

I was driving to work on Tuesday morning, westbound on 88th Avenue between 184th and 176th in Surrey, when I saw a poor little beagle flailing around in the middle of the eastbound lane, howling in agony. Obviously, he had broken hind leg(s), but the cars simply drove around him. Who knows how long he had been there begging for help?

I rushed him to the vet. Unfortunately, it was too late. I'd like to thank the gentleman in the BMW who stopped to help me put the dog in my car and all the women at the All About Pet Clinic in Langley who did what they could for the beagle.

I was appalled by those who just drove by the injured dog, as if he were a garbage bag. Have they no conscience? How could they show so little compassion? This was someone's family member, someone's best friend. I hope these drivers think about that dog every time they look in the mirror.

I'd like the dog's owner to know that he didn't die alone on the side of the cold, dirty road; he died with a loving touch, in the presence of those who did what they could to save his life, no matter how insignificant it was to those who kept driving past him.

LISA NICHOLS
Langley

Right to breathe trumps addiction to nicotine

Re: *Lawsuit filed in condo smoking battle, Westcoast News, May 25*

In the 21st century, with all we know about secondhand smoke, why is Maureen Nicholson's lawsuit even necessary? It is self-evident that the right to a smoke-free home trumps convenient access to an obnoxious and harmful recreational drug.

Furthermore, if Claire Bellwood's neighbours have to tolerate her noxious fumes and the fire hazard she creates, they are entitled to let her know how her behaviour affects them. If legitimate complaints upset her, her problem is with addiction, not the complainant.

There are more of us rooting for Nicholson than she could possibly guess, and she is inspiring others to stand up for their rights. (I am an asthmatic who has been forced to move six times because of smoking neighbours.)

Who knows, maybe in 20 years we will have a government capable of grasping that being able to breathe in one's own home is a necessity and that the lack of smoke-free housing in British Columbia is a real problem requiring a real solution.

SERA KIRK
North Vancouver

Teens have to learn life isn't a video game

Re: *'He was always laughing,' May 22*

It is very sad to see yet another life, Chrisna Poeung's, taken too soon — and for what? Some kids have too much pride, or maybe they feel they have to put on an image of being tough. Kids need to wake up and



Ritu Gill

realize the consequences of their actions. Life is not a video game where you can go around stabbing people. In high school it seems as though fighting is the norm to resolve conflicts. So who do we blame? Society? Violent video games? Bad parenting? A lack of positive role models? I don't know the answer, but I know that kids need to find other ways to deal with conflicts. I don't think this is an easy task, but someone needs to take a

stand. After witnessing the devastating impact of this child's death, I hope students will take something positive from this very negative situation and choose to live more peacefully among their peers. My heart goes out to both the victims and offender's families.

RITU GILL
Surrey

Protesters divert attention from their cause

Re: *Police review actions of TV crew at office protest, May 24*

One must hope that those who trashed Premier Gordon Campbell's office stopped to realize that they, in fact, trashed every taxpayer in this province.

I. BILL GRUENTHAL
Burnaby

Why would a serious newspaper devote one speck of ink to David Cunningham, a self-indulgent former dug addict who advocates criminal action totally disproportionate to his alleged cause?

LARRY ROBINSON
White Rock

Venezuela is a thriving democracy

Re: *Venezuela poised to become another Zimbabwe, Jonathan Manthorpe, May 23*

As the Western Canadian coordinator of the Hands off Venezuela campaign, I was appalled by Jonathan Manthorpe's column.

He accuses President Hugo Chavez of being a military dictator. On the contrary, Venezuela is one of the most democratic countries on the planet, its constitution passed overwhelmingly by referendum in 1999. Chavez has won more electoral contests than any other world leader since his first election in 1998.

Manthorpe describes RCTV as "one of the few remaining critical voices" and complains it is being

taken off the air. In fact, every major media outlet in the country is vehemently opposed to Chavez, as anyone who has been to the country knows. RCTV workers participated in an attempted coup against the democratically elected government. They don't belong on the airwaves, they belong in prison.

I would encourage readers to see www.handsoffvenezuela.org for more information.



MIKE PALECEK

MIKE PALECEK
Vancouver

FSA analysis has no scientific credibility

Re: *School rankings take into account test participation, Elementary School Report Card, May 19*

Whether or not you agree with standardized testing of children such as the Foundation Skills Assessment, there is one aspect that is critical — that the analysis of the test results is scientifically valid and objective. This ensures that the conclusions are supported by the test data. As a scientist, I am appalled at the approach used in the Fraser Institute's analysis of FSA results. In it, students who did not sit the test were assigned a zero score. Essentially fictitious data was introduced into the analysis; for some schools the final ranking is based on 30-per cent made-up data. Such analysis would never be accepted for publication in a quality scientific journal.

I would recommend that *The Vancouver Sun* refuse to publish the FSA-based rankings until this approach of assigning zero scores to students who did not take the test is discontinued.

DR. PAMELA CAMPBELL
Vancouver

Rick Hansen makes the world a better place

Re: *The man's motion at 50, Westcoast News, May 22*

I have had the great pleasure of getting to know Rick Hansen as a director of the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society. The first time I attended a meeting, I was in awe of him — and still am. He is gracious and thanks every director personally for coming to each meeting. He makes everyone feel special and has a wonderful ability to inspire diverse interests to work together towards a common goal. His persistence reminds me of the very sturgeon we are trying to save. The world is certainly a better place because of him.

MARY-SUE ATKINSON
North Vancouver

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