

Roy R. Jeal, Ph.D.
151 Canora Street
Winnipeg MB R3G 1T1

27 July 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa ON

Dear Prime Minister:

Re: Vancouver Safe Injection Site

I write in support of the continuing operation of Insite, the Safe Injection Site for drug users located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Since its beginning, Insite has provided an extremely important service to many persons who are addicted to injection drugs and an extremely important moral and social service to Vancouver and, indeed, to the entire country. Insite, by means of its clean and safe facility, but particularly by means of its dedicated and humane staff members, has prevented numerous deaths of human beings who otherwise certainly would have died, many of them in desperate conditions and locations.

While the prevailing approach to addictions of all kinds has been to require immediate and full abstinence from the addictive substances, it has become clear that the great majority of persons who quit eventually use and abuse the substances again. The abstinence method, while required in many treatment programs, and certainly required for drug addicts admitted to hospitals, is, most of the time by far, a failure. Similarly, incarcerating or otherwise penalizing addicts nearly always fails to help. Helping addicts to reduce harm caused to their bodies and spirits by drugs in the way employed at Insite actually works, precisely by reducing the harm caused, however gradually. Many injection users *do* get off drugs and stay off them using the Safe Injection Site approach. Those who do not stop using drugs *do* experience improved physical, social and spiritual health. Reduction in harm leads to reductions in the levels of health care and social services required, and to reduction in the human pain and misery caused by substance addiction. The benefits are clear and they are morally correct.

It is not appropriate for Canadians, particularly for leaders of government, to allow citizens, however desperate and however repugnant their activities may seem, to be ill and to die in the streets and alleyways of cities of the country. We Canadians have a moral responsibility, indeed a religious responsibility before God, to care for all persons. We provide, in fact we require by legislation, that harm prevention and harm reduction be employed in a variety of areas of daily life. Our Judeo-Christian heritage, combined with the religious and moral traditions of the multiple cultural and social groups of Canadians, calls for us to identify, reduce and prevent the harm caused by any human activity. We

may not “pass by on the other side,” failing to care for the injured. It will not do to take the view that the problems of injection drug users are their own fault—they frequently reflect social and mental health issues rather than clear and rational decisions to abuse drugs—that they have made their own choices and must face the consequences without assistance that actually works to their benefit. As you know, our Christian heritage claims that Christ died for all, even for those who seem to be unacceptable to many.

It is clear that the Insite Safe Injection Site cares for the injured. It saves lives. Insite does not promote drug use nor do its employees assist addicts or others to acquire or use drugs. They work to reduce harm, with the hope of preventing harm, to persons for whom all of us should have heartfelt concern.

Insite is a model for the country and for the world, wherever humans face the pressures and health issues associated with drug addiction. I strongly urge you to move to continue the services provided at Insite.

Yours sincerely,

Roy R. Jeal, Ph.D.
Professor
Booth College
Winnipeg
204-231-0153
204-924-4874
rjeal@boothcollege.ca