

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAM

June 3, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the seizure of huge volumes of fentanyl in recent Yellowknife drug busts is an indication that at least some NWT residents are turning to the black market to satisfy drug addictions. In some cases, these addictions are the result of legitimate medical prescriptions.

An NWT coroner's report last year raised alarms over overuse and misuse of prescriptions and how people are being prescribed potentially dangerous amounts of legal drugs by seeking multiple prescriptions.

One means of reducing that supply for new and existing addicts is the creation of a prescription drug monitoring program. The Department of Health and Social Services has made some progress on developing this idea, but it now appears to be stalled.

Obviously, any prescription monitoring program needs to be consistent with the new Electronic Medical Record, or EMR system. At this time, the EMR system can't produce a valid prescription for a pharmacist. Apparently, work is underway to make this possible within patient confidentiality requirements. The main problem at the moment, though, appears to be money.

The Minister of Health and Social Services points out that a monitoring program would require some dedicated staff time and an information system linked to all NWT pharmacies that can offer real-time access to patients' prescription histories.

In the meantime, the department is educating clinicians about appropriate prescribing practices and teaching them to identify patients who may be addicted or at risk of becoming addicted to opioids and other drugs.

I'm putting this issue back on the table, Mr. Speaker. I realize this budget doesn't include funds for a prescription monitoring program. The Health department rightly takes the overall approach that prevention is the surest path to patient health and that prevention is less costly than treatment. In the case of addiction in particular, any steps to reduce the number of persons who will ultimately need difficult and costly behavioural therapy will be a good investment. I'll have questions for the Minister on the current status of this program and plans for kick starting it in the next budget session. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.