

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAM

February 15, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NWT does not have a prescription drug monitoring program. It is time for the government to make that investment in order to prevent the injury and, worse, the death of NWT residents.

Mr. Speaker, last month media reported on a prescription overdose case of a man from Lutselk'e. The drugstore allegedly dispensed a dose 10 times greater than the medication he was prescribed by his doctor. After taking the pills for a while, he said he felt dizzy and tired. A nurse in his community caught the mistake before the excess medication damaged his health permanently.

Once this event was reported, a constituent came to me and reported the same kind of problem -- a mistaken dosage at the pharmacy that caused her significant health issues.

Mr. Speaker, these problems are likely to tip of the iceberg. The NWT coroner has raised the alarm about another dimension of prescription drugs, their overuse and misuse. The coroner estimated 17 overdose deaths between 2009 and 2012 of people who were described potentially dangerous amounts of legal drugs by seeking multiple prescriptions.

One means of providing oversight for both of these problems is the creation of a prescription drug monitoring program. Obviously, any prescription monitoring program needs to be consistent with the electronic medical records system, or EMR. Last I heard, the EMR system cannot produce a valid prescription for a pharmacist. Apparently, work is under way to make this possible within patient confidentiality requirements. The main problem at the moment, though, appears to be money.

What is required is 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, which, of course, is a good idea.

I am putting this issue back on the table, Mr. Speaker. I realize this budget does not include funds for a prescription monitoring program, but it may be possible that eliminating multiple prescriptions could pay for the implementation of the program itself. While we wait for this program to roll out, prescription mistakes are jeopardizing the health of NWT residents. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.