

PSEUDOEPHEDRINE SALES

20 February 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse a question about the logging of pseudoephedrine sales in South Australia.

Leave granted.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: As has recently been discussed in this place, the methamphetamine precursor drug pseudoephedrine is found in many cold and flu tablets. These tablets then become a regular target of so-called drug cooks, either by way of theft or, as is often the case, legal purchases from pharmacies. A new report from the Missouri State Highway Patrol has shown an almost 45 per cent decrease in meth labs after they set up a system that logged all purchases of pseudoephedrine tablets.

The system alerts pharmacists if a purchaser has attended several other chemists to buy tablets within a short period. The Queensland Pharmacy Guild and some other pharmacies in that state (comprising some 85 per cent of Queensland pharmacies) have something similar to the Missouri project called 'Project Stop', which is an online realtime logging system which has already resulted in 34 arrests in Queensland and also a 25 per cent reduction in the number of discovered meth labs in the past 12 months (according to our discussions with Queensland Drug Squad Detective Superintendent Brian Wilkins).

I understand that in South Australia currently we only have a written log kept of pseudoephedrine sales, which is sometimes only processed months after the purchase event. We understand that the National Precursor Diversion Group has suggested some steps to have the Queensland realtime logging system rolled out in South Australian Guild pharmacies to reduce the manufacture and abuse of methamphetamine. My questions are:

1. When will we have an online logging system (similar to that in Queensland) in South Australia?
2. If the system is rolled out here, will the minister ensure that all pharmacies must log sales and not just guild pharmacies?
3. Given that some alternatives to pseudoephedrine based drugs now exist, would the minister advocate for making pseudoephedrine a schedule 4 drug so that people who require it can obtain it only with a prescription?
4. What other measures has the minister, as the Minister for Substance Abuse, put in place to reduce the manufacture and abuse of methamphetamines in South Australia?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse):

Currently, I understand that pseudoephedrine is required to be stored behind the counter in chemists. The purchaser is required to give their name and address, which is logged by the pharmacist at the time of purchase and that list is made available to Drug & Alcohol Services South Australia and I also understand to SAPOL. We already have in place an extensive database that can pick up abusers or excessive purchasers of pseudoephedrine. We have also undertaken quite extensive discussions with pharmacists around South Australia looking at these problems and others and looking at a range of strategies but, to date, there has been no definitive consensus.

In relation to, for instance, making pseudoephedrine a schedule 4 medication, there are arguments both for and against. It certainly does make it more difficult to purchase these particular drugs, but it has also been pointed out to us that it is a very common drug not only for cold and flu preparations but also for those unfortunate sufferers of hay fever. It is considered by some to be overly cumbersome and expensive to require a person to visit a GP to obtain a prescription which they then fill at a chemist. We have listened to those sorts of arguments. I am aware of the Queensland system: it is a very comprehensive

system and it requires the full cooperation of pharmacists. A system such as that will be effective only if we have the full cooperation of everyone. It is also an extremely expensive system and, of course, the costs of those sorts of things are inevitably passed on to consumers.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I have a supplementary question. Will the minister consider adding photo identification to the requirements of the current logging system in South Australia which requires the giving of the purchaser's name and address?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I am happy to consider that. Obviously we would need to discuss that option with the pharmacies because, after all, the pharmacist would be the one required to obtain that extra piece of information.

As I said, we are in fairly regular discussions and negotiations with pharmacists, so I am happy to have this matter raised in that forum.