

ON DRUG ABUSE IN NORTH CAROLINA

I want to talk with you about a very serious problem which is a part of my day-to-day duties as your Attorney General - a problem into which I have had an unusual opportunity to gain special insight, enabling me to share with you some thoughts and observations which should be of interest to you.

I have been your Attorney General for only a short while now, but I believe that I came into office just as the drug problem began to emerge as a major concern in North Carolina, and I have seen its effects during the last several months. I think good evidence of the seriousness of the problem in our state is the fact that our Governor and a committee of concerned citizens throughout North Carolina recently held a conference on drugs in Raleigh attended by more than 2,000 persons from every area of our state and representing nearly every profession.

I had an opportunity to attend a portion of the conference and to participate in the program. After hearing the testimony of three young people who had themselves been addicted to drugs, hearing top officials in the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and the National Mental Health Institute and others, I became more convinced than ever that those of us serving you in public office must devote more time to arousing public concern and prompting civic action to curb the rising tide of drug abuse.

There are some who have indicated that the dimensions of the problem have been exaggerated, but I will say this to you, anyone who believes that drug abuse in North Carolina is just a scare phrase used by law enforcement officials simply doesn't understand the consequences of what I consider a major problem of this new decade.

Drug abuse is not the sole and exclusive problem of law enforcement officers. You have only to think for a

moment to realize that it is certainly a concern of mental health officials, of educators, of physicians and others. However, the role of the law enforcement officer is peculiar. When many persons such as doctors and teachers, deal with those caught in the tangles of illegal drug use, it is in the privacy of their offices - in counseling and in treatment sessions - the public eye is not upon them. But you know as well as I that every move the officer makes today is subject to public scrutiny, that the arrests he makes are public records, that his actions are a continuing object of news coverage.

Of course, I do not object to this. However, because of the difference between the role played by law enforcement and others fighting drug abuse, the public often tends to believe that the problem affects no one but the officer. That the only solution to drug abuse must come from law enforcement. Surely this is not true, though law enforcement does have a very vital role.

To compound the many misconceptions about drug abuse, there are some persons who would have their fellow citizens believe that law enforcement officials are in fact getting a great kick out of the surge of illegal drug use. There are some who say that law enforcement has abandoned all else and

is on some sort of lark, enjoying in some perverted way the misfortune of others.

Nothing could be further from the truth and, as chief spokesman for law enforcement in North Carolina, I become extremely disturbed whenever I hear or read such inferences. Strangely enough, however, such comments too often come from those who should be sufficiently informed to know better.

I would like to destroy this misconception, this seed which has been planted in the minds of some of our people by others who seemingly believe that there is no drug problem in North Carolina, who contend that a few of our young people are engaged in a harmless, passing fad and that North Carolina is experiencing nothing more than a mild increase in marijuana use.

During the last couple of weeks four autopsy reports prepared by the State Medical Examiner have come to my desk. Down at the bottom of each of those reports is a space in which to write the probable cause of death.

Dr. Page Hudson, the State Medical Examiner, had written on two "heroin poisoning"; the other two read acute narcotism and showed that fatal amounts of morphine were found in internal organs.

Who were the victims? Derelicts? Skid row types who had turned to drugs to forget wasted lives and to conjure up one last "pipe dream"? No. They were not.

Let's look at their ages. The two oldest of the four were 19; one was eighteen and another, the son of a lay minister, was only 16. The report shows that all were well-developed and otherwise seemingly healthy.

One of the young boys had been riding a bicycle and playing basketball earlier in the afternoon, then came in the house and collapsed in the bedroom. His parents contended that he had never taken drugs and he died suddenly at 8:00 PM before his condition could even be diagnosed.

Another of these youngsters showed evidence of being beaten and kicked and officers were told his condition was a result of having drunk household detergent. No traces of detergent were found, however, and consequently he died of drug poisoning. Though no arrests were made, certainly foul play was apparent.

The circumstances by which these cases came to the attention of authorities were different but the final conclusion in each case was the same: extensive examinations showed that cause of death was overdoses of hard narcotics and even the most cursory examination showed the tell-tale needle marks.

Try to convince the relatives of these young men that there is no problem of drug abuse in this State. Try convincing the parents of three Raleigh teenagers - 15 years old, I believe - who are now in critical condition from taking overdoses of drugs here in this city. Try convincing them and hundreds of other parents who have faced similar tragedies in North Carolina, that law enforcement officials and others represented here today should not be concerned about the problem.

I don't need to tell you that the crime rate is increasing in our State and Nation. We all know that. But some have implied that in this time of increasing crime, law enforcement authorities should not be concerned about the drug traffic but should attack other forms of crime.

I ask the question, "How do such persons separate in their own minds - and to their own satisfaction - increasing drug use and the generally increasing crime rate - especially violent crimes?"

Someone suggested that this could be done, so I got on the phone and called several of our experienced SBI agents throughout the State and asked them if they could see any connection between the two. I remind you now that I am talking to men who work daily in law enforcement, who work almost exclusively with serious crimes and most often crimes of violence. These men are not simply theorists, but practical, experienced and skilled men in law enforcement.

They answered without hesitation that there is a connection between the alarming increase in crime and drug abuse and one after another they threw out illustrations to support their conclusions. Let me share a few of them with you, if I may.

Our larger cities, centers of the hard narcotic traffic, have been plagued with robberies in recent months and as you have heard or read the news, several innocent storekeepers and service station operators have senselessly been gunned down even though they offered no resistance.

In Charlotte, an elderly storekeeper and his wife were murdered in a robbery and the man charged with their deaths is an addict. Arrests have been made in a series of robberies in that city - those charged were addicts.

In testifying before a Congressional Committee, Police Chief Jerry Wilson of Washington, D. C. stated, "The narcotics

problem is adding considerably to the problem of crime. We find this problem even among juvenile holdup men ... It is not at all unusual to arrest a 16 or 17 year old in a holdup and find that they are narcotics users."

It is easy for those of us from smaller communities to say, "Well, that is Charlotte, or Washington, D. C., and we expect such things to occur in our larger cities but it won't happen in my little town." This simply isn't true. When an addict has to turn repeatedly to criminal acts to secure funds to purchase narcotics, often he must go to other communities in order to avoid recognition. He may live in an urban community, but prey by day or by night on a small rural village or country store or filling station.

Many areas of the State who would not admit to having a drug problem are having problems with breaking and entering and burglaries. There is certainly a strong likelihood that they do in fact have a drug problem.

Let me illustrate this by citing a case which also occurred in North Carolina. A notorious Eastern North Carolina racketeer would frequent dives and hangouts in larger cities of the North in order to learn the members of the drug community. Then, he would gather up several carloads of addicts, supply them with forged checks made on North Carolina companies,

transport them to North Carolina, dump them in a shopping center and flood the merchants with forgeries. In a few hours, he would gather them back up, return north to Richmond, Baltimore and other cities, give them a percentage of the "take" to supply their habit and pocket the rest. This Eastern North Carolina community of some 20,000 probably would not admit to having a drug problem.

Drug addiction is an expensive habit. It can run from \$20.00 to \$100.00 a day, and the victim, because of his dependence on the habit, is going to obtain the money somewhere to support it. If there were no other evidence, common sense would tell us that there are few legal ways that a person - especially an uneducated person - can support that kind of habit. The person turns to crime - to shoplifting, to armed robbery, and other forms of thievery in order to support his habit from day to day.

Businessmen will tell you the tremendous losses which they are incurring from shoplifting. One major chain estimates that it loses 10% annually from shoplifting, and this loss, of course, must be recovered from the straight consumer.

Goods stolen must be disposed of - converted to money for sidewalk or backroom purchases of drugs - so a chain of unlawful acts is set off by the addiction problem. The addict steals the goods; he sells them to a middle man who in turn must find the ultimate market for them. So one criminal act breeds another and after a while it becomes impossible to tell just

how far the influence of illegal drug use does extend.

We know also that one major way to support a habit is to get others addicted - in other words, to create a drug market in which to operate and make enough profits to support a personal habit. And there is violence within the illegal drug community itself.

I could tell you of a recent execution in the style of Chicago gangland murders which occurred right here in North Carolina. The plot is simple. Two brothers, both unemployed, maintained an expensive apartment and a high scale of living. They had Fifty Dollar-a-day habits themselves and they had a corner on the illegal drug market in their town. Competing pushers were squeezing in so the brothers simply waited in an alley and gunned down their competition in the drug traffic.

There is money to be made in drugs and you may be assured that as long as there is, the criminal community is going to vie for control of the market. Its members are going to make sure that new people, young people, are introduced to drugs, that they are addicted to drugs, and that drugs are available to support their habits.

Recently, agents of the State Bureau of Investigation, working undercover, made contacts in the drug community to

purchase a large quantity of stimulents. The original purchase price was to be more than \$10,000 but our agents could not obtain that kind of money to show even though arrests would be made on the spot and the money recovered immediately. We did manage to obtain a few thousand dollars and the buy was arranged.

Three armed men came to make the sale. They had in their possession nearly 50,000 capsules worth a small fortune in the retail drug traffic. All three of the men were arrested in spite of the fact that one stood guard outside the room where agents and pusher dealt, ready to shoot anyone who tried to frustrate the sale.

The drug business is lucrative enough that here in our own State laboratories have been set up to produce nothing but illegal drugs. Local officers and agents from the State Bureau of Investigation recently closed down such a laboratory in Piedmont North Carolina which was manufacturing in bulk an LSD-type drug. None of these capsules were destined for legitimate medical use; in fact, there is no present medical use for it. In addition, chemicals were seized that would permit the manufacture of a variety of other illegal drugs.

The man was not in the business for kicks - this was no fad for him. It was a business proposition and he was making money.

Needless to say, drugs were serious business also for the young men who executed a 19-year old acquaintance they thought was ready to inform on them. I think that probably most of our people are concerned most about the way drugs have touched our young people. In a very real way they have become the victims of this age of drug abuse. They are by nature experimenters and drugs for centuries have presented a mystery to men.

Those of you who are parents know how difficult it is to impress a youngster with danger, whether it be with the danger presented by fire and high places, and later fast cars and alcohol. Again it is the nature of young people to a certain extent to defy danger sometimes until taught by experience.

You know that lessons learned by experience come hard. Thank goodness there is another way to learn - the way we learn most things - by the experience of others. We want to teach our young people the danger of drugs, we want to spare them the pain and the heartache that accompanies drug use and drug addiction.

Again, speaking for law enforcement personnel throughout this State, I know that our officers do not want to see the lives of our young people marred or teenagers persecuted for engaging in drug experimentation.

It is for this reason that the State Bureau of Investigation and law enforcement agencies have concentrated their efforts on stopping those dealing in drugs, those pushing drugs and preying on the nature and weaknesses of their fellow North Carolinians.

Some persons have asked how we can make such a statement when arrests are made for possession and sale of comparatively small quantities of drugs valued at only a few hundred dollars. One answer is this: Our undercover people have limited funds with which to make buys from pushers. By necessity they must deal in small amounts. So in most cases a defendant will be charged with selling fairly small quantities. On the other hand, during the course of his business, the dealer handles large quantities of drugs and probably made sales to persons in the illegal drug community many times larger than the sale made to undercover agents. I would point out, however, that one defendant in recent drug arrests, an 18 year old youngster, sold to our agent quantities of LSD (not marijuana) amounting to more than \$1,500. In my opinion, this is big business, especially for a teenager.

But again we have a problem created by the fact that the activities of officers are gauged by public records and the people have little understanding of the total problem.

Why should we be concerned that our young people are experimenting with drugs? Why should law enforcement officials be trying to dry up the market and place them beyond the reach of the teenagers in our high schools and the young people in our society?

Listen to the words of a young man in the Eastern part of our State who got high on drugs - a "clean high", as some members of the drug community call drug use as contrasted with the use of alcohol. This young man, while under the influence of drugs - while on a "clean high" - picked up his small baby, his own child, and slammed her against the wall killing her. Later he realized what he had done and attempted to hide the nearly dead child in a trash dump. It was discovered there in that trash dump where it had died, and the father was tried and sentenced to life in prison.

However, before being sentenced, he was asked by the presiding judge if there was anything he would like to say. The actual Court Record reveals he answered this way:

"Defendant : Yes, there is, your Honor. Like the Solicitor says, it is a tragic thing for a person to let himself be taken into this drug world and not really understand what it is all about and yet think that he does know

all the time. In thinking as to what has happened to me, if only time could be turned back, with a little more understanding, just to change one second of one's life.

"These things would never happen, if only the young people in society, like myself, understood what was going to happen when they permit themselves to go into this type of conduct.

"I certainly don't condone what has happened as to me and it is going to be a hard thing for me to have to live the rest of my life with this burden on my shoulders and the shame that it has caused my family.

"But I just hope that as a result of this, maybe there are young people here in this city and this county of ours, and all over the world, can look at me as an example and not let themselves get off into this same situation that I have gotten myself into.

"I wish there was some way to change it all. That is all I can say, sir."

A similar statement, but in different words, might come from a young salesman in the same section of our State who, after smoking marijuana, killed a customer in a dispute over a bill; or from a young husband, who while under the influence of drugs, brutally killed his wife and left his infant child to perish from inattention by her side; or from a young soldier, who committed a bold daylight robbery in an attempt to support a drug habit acquired in Viet Nam.

And yet, as I pointed out earlier, there are those who scoff at the problem of drug use in relation to crime. The pattern is so clear that it frightens me to think that there might be one person who cannot see this clear evidence.

And let me further warn, that some of the drugs involved in these cases were for the most part so-called mild drugs - or "safe" - and what a misnomer!

The renowned physician and author, Oliver Wendell Holmes, stated that if the drugs of his time could be sunk to the bottom of the sea "it would be all the better for mankind - all the worse for the fishes." Today, we have found many legitimate, medical uses for drugs. However, we could adopt Dr. Holmes' statement by saying that if all illegal drugs of our time could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be better for all mankind.

What we do today to combat the illegal use of drugs in North Carolina will reflect tomorrow on crime in North Carolina - the increase or decrease. Let us face this fact squarely and not simper behind the platitudes that college students are just having a fling, or boys will be boys or what harm is one "pot party." The drug ring behind that "pot party" is deadly, the crime committed because of drug use is deadly - the danger is there - we must recognize it.