

## **ASSISTED SUICIDE**

**13 November 2007**

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD:** Philip Nitschke will today hold a seminar on suicide in Fullarton, and he will also show a video entitled *Single Shot* at a private residence following that workshop. The homemade video provides instructions for the production of the suicide pill often known as Nembutal (the barbiturate pentobarbital). In the video, a group of Queenslanders are shown manufacturing the drug in a coffee pot-type apparatus.

Recently, the Australian Medical Association publicly criticised the Philip Nitschke workshops for their promotion of suicide, rather than the relief of pain or suffering, as they are purported to be. Australian families have already dealt with approximately 2,100 suicides this year, and there has been significant concern that wide dissemination of suicide techniques will increase that already high number of suicides.

The drug has now been removed from the federal list of drugs that can be prescribed for humans and, federally, it has been banned from importation. However, my reading of the South Australian Controlled Substances (Prohibited Substances) Regulations is that schedule 1 does not prohibit the active ingredient of Nembutal in this state. If the substance were prohibited, the police would have additional powers to restrict the dealing in and manufacture of this drug, which is encouraged at the Nitschke workshops. My question is: will the minister add the active ingredient of Nembutal to the South Australian list of prohibited substances (perhaps with an exception for veterinarians) so that those who assist others in the manufacture or supply of this drug can be dealt with appropriately under the law?

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health) (14:56):** I thank the honourable member for his most important question. Indeed, he is correct in saying that the publicising or the media reporting of details of suicide methods has been

found to have quite detrimental effects, tending to result in an increase in suicide attempts involving those particular methods, at least in the short term. That is why we have media protocols and policies, which most media outlets comply with, which talk about being very careful and sensitive about the sort of details that are given in suicide reporting.

Indeed, promoting any substance or technique as a successful means of suicide is something that is not to be supported; in fact, it is found, potentially at least, to have quite a detrimental effect on people who might be feeling depressed at the time and who are considering suicide, and that is a concern. I remind all media bodies of those guidelines and protocols. As I have said, the media, in the main, adhere extremely well to those guidelines and protocols, and they are to be congratulated for that.

In terms of the workshops, I am concerned that a workshop is to be held that promotes any method of suicide. We know that voluntary euthanasia is a separate issue, and I have expressed my personal views about that issue in this place on more than one occasion. So, excluding the issue of voluntary euthanasia, I am talking about the matter referred to by the member, that is, a workshop promoting a particular drug as a successful means of suicide for those people other than those considering voluntary euthanasia. That is a great concern to me, and I understand that Mal Hyde has indicated that he will be monitoring those workshops very carefully, and we will be very interested to receive his advice or recommendations arising from that monitoring.

In terms of rescheduling these drugs, Nembutal is a drug that is used in a wide range of therapeutic ways. At this point I would be concerned about rescheduling any medication on the grounds of the potential abuse or distortion of the therapeutic use of a particular drug and promoting it to be used in an unintended manner. I am happy to look into the matter but, as I said, on the surface of it we could, in fact, end up having to reschedule perhaps two-thirds of the pharmaceuticals currently on the market because they could potentially be used in a way to assist suicide. We would need to proceed very cautiously before doing that.