

Look out, here they come: DRUGS!

Sam's drug-replacement plan panned

Of all the spin-doctored proposals Sam Sullivan has hatched, none is as ultimately off base as CAST, his drug replacement baby, which he has asked the federal Conservative government to fund.

CAST is, simply, part and parcel of His Worship's distorted effort to show heart through hubristic populism, and no less banal than any of his other numberless (non)triumphs.

The quest for enlightenment begins with a read of its website (www.cast-vancouver.org).

It is as stupefying as it is embarrassing.

The notion of replacing street drugs with a drug substitute – although somewhat new – is nothing more than placing addicts at the trough of the perpetual drug need, all in the name of (false) compassion.

These science fiction proponents hail studies as a case made. However, not one study shows with any supremacy that this hogwash works.

In fact, once past the outer layers of fluff, it is abundantly evident that not only the findings from such studies are massaged by CAST proponents, but further, that the mayor and his cadre are wanting of our tax dollars to study studies which are inconclusive at best, and, at least, utter failures in proving CAST or any related initiative worthy of being funded.

But the doctors and retired politicians backing these reports claim success, which begs the question: If the evidence proves that such lunacy is indeed effective, why further studies?

They argue that studies needn't be endlessly repeated to be valid. Then why are they arguing for the CAST study? The contradiction is obscene.

When Mayor Sullivan, or the city's drug czar Don MacPherson, state that drug replacement is 'harm reduction', the cacophony is amplified.

It is hardly medical treatment to permanently burden an addict with yet another dependency. Instead, the

studies expound the social good in all this.

Rather than trumpet the recovery of addicts, which would support the mayor's misstatements, the hypothesis runs in the opposite direction. Fringe replacement efforts will make for much "social justice", but all without saying how.

This CAST nonsense is not about anything else except sanitizing the streets of the DTES, so that Japanese and German tourists won't have to refocus their camera lenses in 2010.

This is about using a social construct, and not a very good one, to aid the mayor's re-election agenda.

Would you put a loved one suffering from skin cancer in a tanning bed as treatment? Would you offer lower-tar cigarettes to a lung cancer patient?

Highly questionable social good trumps individual recovery in Sam's world. This program will hurt people. Addicts will have no chance for a normal life.

Moreover, how ethical is it to start on a drug protocol with no chance of continuing?

The drug replacement must persist forever, notwithstanding that most addicts, particularly on the DTES, are not last-chance, no-hope candidates.

Why are we offering palliative care to people who are not terminal?

Besides, which federal or provincial government wants to become the drug dealer?

All the drug legalization obliivots

aside, the street dealers would have a field day in competition.

The scholarship purportedly in support of CAST has been misrepresented on the website. Troubling still, the Mayor has company, plump with controversy.

Included in Mr. Sullivan's CAST inner sanctum is Dr. David Marsh, the chief officiating guru at Vancouver Coastal Health, who is an expatriate of Toronto country, where he failed to

convince his colleagues to put the Taranah Corridor's first NAOMI heroin trial next to a methadone recovery clinic – a no-no of monumental proportions to any addiction doc – since it's considered a 'trigger' to have a recovering addict anywhere near drugs or drug use.

Dr. Marsh has the ear of our Mayor. He often will advise Sobriety Sam on how to sell CAST.

Don't believe me?

Earlier this year, on the day our Mayor hinted that CAST might replace Insite/Four Pillars, Dr. Marsh raced

down to the mayor's office and spent the afternoon trying to undo the media firestorm that young Sammy had created.

To clean up the DTES we need: Treatment beds, in the hundreds; adequate housing (but not necessarily just downtown); and the re-opening of Riverview's full facilities with a state-of-the-art mental health/drug treatment facility – not Yaletown redux at Riverview.

And if the Four Pillars is finally going to really work, then fund all FOUR pillars. Enforcement, Treatment and Education are a must. We have to get into schools and talk to our children about what's killing us.

But alas, Mayor Sullivan won't listen to the Drug Prevention Network; Al Arsenault, Exec. Director of the Odd Squad Society; Vancouver addiction specialists Dr. Colin Mangham, Doug Coleman, Donald Hedges; David Berner, former addiction counselor and local pundit or former Justice Wally Craig and countless addictionologists who know the DTES well.

He would rather beg, profusely, at failure's open door.

On the issue of dealing with drug issues in Vancouver, Sullivan has created a culture of ethical frivolity.

He and his sycophants subvert any hope for genuine help for the addicted downtrodden, preferring, alternatively, to mid-wife extended tyranny on the DTES.

Unbelievably, through all of this, there are people who still believe that Sam Sullivan is entirely palatable as Mayor for 2008.

A. G. Tsakumis is our bi-monthly editorial writer and appears in this space every other Friday.



alex tsakumis
REBEL WITH A CLAUSE