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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1140)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I'm going to call this meeting to order.

This is meeting number 6 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Thursday, October 6, 2011. Today we are continuing our study on drugs and alcohol in prisons. Part of the directive of our motion is to study how drugs and alcohol enter prisons, and the impact they have on the rehabilitation of offenders and on the safety of correctional officers and on crime within the institution.

In our first hour we will hear from the Office of the Correctional Investigator. We're pleased to have that office represented by two individuals today. Appearing again before us is Mr. Howard Sapers, the correctional investigator; and Ivan Zinger, the executive director and general counsel.

It seems as if every time Mr. Sapers comes, there are bells ringing or something and usually we've had to format the day in a way that is never perfect. Other times we've put other witnesses together with him, and we don't like doing that. But today we are going to cut back on our time a little bit. I'm just going to let the opposition and government members know that I'm going to go with five-minute rounds so that we can still get to our questions.

We look forward to your comments and would welcome them now. We're probably going to go for about 40 minutes and have another 45-minute period after that.

Mr. Sapers, welcome again, and we look forward to your comments.

Mr. Howard Sapers (Correctional Investigator, Office of the Correctional Investigator): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be back. I'm happy to be involved in this study.

Mr. Chair, I realize that committee members have received a written copy of our comments in advance. I'm wondering if you would like to just consider them read into the record and proceed to questions, or do you want me to quickly go through them in any case?

The Chair: Just do whatever you would prefer. I don't know how many have had the opportunity to speak.

Is that what you would want to hear?

Mr. Howard Sapers: It would be better to go through them.

The Chair: Sure, okay.

Mr. Howard Sapers: Thank you, I'll proceed quickly then.

There is little doubt that the presence of illicit drugs and alcohol in federal prisons is a major safety and security challenge. The smuggling and trafficking of illicit substances and the diversion of legal drugs inside federal penitentiaries present inherent risks that ultimately jeopardize the safety and security of institutions and the people who live and work inside them. I commend the committee for taking on this very important and complex review.

I am pleased to be joined today, as you noted, by the executive director of my office, Dr. Ivan Zinger. Dr. Zinger will speak to the role of my office as an ombudsman for federal offenders and he will reference some of the emerging data and research in this area of corrections.

I'll then provide some reflections on how the anti-drug strategy of the Correctional Service of Canada is working or not, and point to some forward directions for reform.

Dr. Zinger.

[Translation]

Dr. Ivan Zinger (Executive Director and General Counsel, Office of the Correctional Investigator): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator serves as an ombudsman for federally sentenced offenders.

The office's mandate provides for independent monitoring and oversight of federal correctional services. On an annual basis, the Office receives approximately 6,000 offender complaints.

In 2010-11, investigators spent in excess of 370 days in federal penitentiaries and interviewed more than 2,100 offenders. In last fiscal year, the Office received 20,000 calls on its toll-free number and conducted over 1,200 uses of force reviews.

The office acknowledges that the institutional drug trade, which includes the improper use of prescription drugs, is a major source of institutional violence. The drug trade is often controlled or influenced by gang activity and the presence of organized crime. In prison as well as on the street, the drug trade is associated with predatory behaviours, such as intimidation, muscling and extortion. Within Correctional Service Canada facilities, it is estimated that gangs are involved in close to 25% of the major security incidents.

Just over half of federal offenders report being under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants when they committed the offence that led to their incarceration. Four out of five offenders now arrive at a federal institution with a history of substance abuse. Living with addiction or managing a substance abuse problem in a prison setting creates its own laws of supply and demand.

A very high percentage of the offender population that abuses drugs is also concurrently struggling with mental health problems. As we are beginning to understand, the interplay between addiction, substance abuse and mental health functioning is complex and dynamic. Criminality adds yet another complication to an issue that defies easy solutions.

[English]

Mr. Howard Sapers: Within the correctional system, drug suppression activities of course have to be consistent with an environment that is conducive to rehabilitation and, eventually, to safe and timely reintegration back into the community.

Eliminating drugs and alcohol from prison appears deceptively simple, but has proven to be very difficult and costly in practice. The problem of intoxicants in prison is difficult to measure and therefore difficult to monitor. Drug supply and utilization are illegal and underground activities. It's extremely difficult to generate a reliable number, or predictor, of the extent of the drug problem inside Canadian penitentiaries. We know that drugs are in prisons. We simply don't know the extent of the drug use.

Demand for drugs has always been present in prison. The reality is that in a prison setting, there are ever more ingenious and adaptive methods to smuggle, move, and conceal contraband. Short of completely banning all visits and all interaction with the outside world, and the imposition of extraordinarily intrusive workplace rules, the idea of a drug-free prison remains commendable in theory but highly improbable in reality.

The Correctional Service recorded over 1,700 drug-related seizures in the last fiscal year. The number of drug seizures in recent years has increased, but it's difficult to say whether the service is on top of the problem or simply scratching the surface. The question remains, is the number of seizures related to better enforcement, intelligence, and staff training or simply to increases in the amount of drugs being smuggled into federal penitentiaries?

Sometimes, well-meaning policy changes contribute to the problem of contraband in prison. In May of 2008, the service instituted a total tobacco ban. Now tobacco is the number one illegal commodity on the inside. According to information contained in daily situation reports, there appear to be far more seizures of this substance on a regular basis than any other contraband.

● (1145)

[Translation]

Dr. Ivan Zinger: The Correctional Service of Canada wants to find ways to restrict and deter the entry, trafficking and demand for drugs in its institutions. In recent years, the government has made significant investments in support of CSC's drug interdiction efforts. In August 2008, for example, the then Minister of Public Safety announced a five-year \$120 million investment in the Service's anti-drug strategy.

Since 2008, that investment has supported the following initiatives: expansion of the drug detector dog team program; hiring of new security intelligence staff; purchase of advanced detection technologies, such as ion scanners, x-ray machines and metal detectors, and; more stringent search standards, enhanced staff training and more robust deployment rosters at principal entrances and perimeters.

It is important to note that at the time no new funding was provided for or invested in substance abuse programming.

As these measures have been rolled out, there have been some positive, if modest and even expected gains, including a rise in the number of drug-related seizures. In his appearance before this committee, the Commissioner of Corrections reported that some staff members have been dismissed from the Service as a result of their involvement in the prison drug trade. According to CSC's Corporate Reporting System, the national average of positive random urinalysis drug results in CSC facilities has remained remarkably stable over the last decade—averaging 10.5%. The random urinalysis testing rate is a good gauge of whether drug use is up or down in federal institutions and right now the jury has still not ruled conclusively.

The importance of performance evaluation, empirically based evidence and supporting research cannot be under-estimated in the context of a coherent, comprehensive and cost-effective prison anti-drug strategy.

Two recent reviews conducted by the service's own research branch—one looking at the use of drug detection dogs in correctional facilities and the other examining the use of ion scanners—indicate the need for additional research to support the effectiveness of these measures. In the case of ion scanners, the review noted:

Additional research is needed to address gaps in our knowledge such as determining the impact of IMS units (Ion Mobility Spectrometry) on inmate drug use and institutional behaviour, drug smuggling by inmates, staff and visitors.

And in the case of the drug detector dog review: "the only available evidence for the effectiveness of drug dogs in reducing drug importation and smuggling in a correctional environment is anecdotal."

● (1150)

[English]

The Chair: We're already at 11 minutes, Mr. Sapers, so could you very quickly work your way through it, please.

Mr. Howard Sapers: I'll go right through it, Mr. Chairman.

The CSC's transformation agenda has set a very ambitious goal to eliminate illicit drugs from its institutions, but drugs are still getting through the front gate and over the wall. The office's analysis suggests that CSC's current anti-drug strategy appears to lack three key elements: an integrated and cohesive link between interdiction and suppression activities and prevention, treatment, and harm reduction measures; a comprehensive public reporting mechanism; and a well-defined evaluation, review, and performance plan to measure the overall effectiveness of its investments.

In my view, the elements of a coherent and comprehensive anti-drug strategy would reasonably include the following set of performance indicators and public reporting measures: decreased gang activity; a reduction in the number of major security incidents; a decrease in the transmission rate of communicable diseases; increased use of dynamic security practices; an increase in the number of offenders enrolled and completing substance abuse programs; reduced demand for illicit drugs through effective and innovative treatment; and increased investment in substance abuse, prevention, and harm reduction programs.

We encourage the Correctional Service to pursue all of these areas. We're concerned that there might be some backsliding. For example, according to CSC's own corporate reporting system, there has actually been a net \$2 million reduction in expenditures on substance abuse programs in federal corrections over the last two fiscal years.

Substance abuse and drug addiction can be managed through the right combination of treatment, supportive interventions, and supply reduction. Suppression alone can only go so far in addressing addiction issues, including the spread of infectious diseases. Of note is the fact inmates are 7 to 10 times more likely than the general Canadian population to be living with HIV/AIDS, and 30 times more likely to have hepatitis C.

A range and balance of supply and demand measures are needed to tackle the prison drug problem. Detection, enforcement, and suppression efforts must be balanced against an equally robust series of interventions, such as substance abuse programming and relapse and harm reduction measures, including opiate substitution. Other cessation, prevention, counselling, and support services should be used in balance with the efforts that target the supply side of this issue.

Again, thank you very much for inviting me. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Rathgeber, please, five minutes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Sapers, and Mr. Zinger. It's good to see both of you again.

Mr. Sapers, you are the correctional investigator, the correctional ombudsman. Your job is to investigate complaints filed by inmates of the Correctional Service of Canada. Is that correct?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: We heard some interesting and, I would submit, troubling testimony on Tuesday concerning strip searches. How many complaints does your office handle on an annual basis generally, of any kind or any nature?

Mr. Howard Sapers: We'll get about 20,000 contacts. We'll receive another 1,000 to 1,200 use-of-force reviews. We'll conduct a few thousand of what we call "investigations". The number one area of concern in these investigations usually pertains to access to, and quality of, health care.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: By these 20,000 contacts I'm assuming that you mean a prisoner either phoning you or writing you with some grievance that he or she wants you to investigate. Is that what you mean by a contact?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Those 20,000 contacts are through our toll-free number. We also receive a number of letters, and have open visits in institutions where my staff will spend days interviewing inmates. So our actual involvement with or responses to calls for service exceeds 20,000.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: How many of those contacts involve some sort of allegation of mistreatment as a result of a so-called strip search?

Mr. Howard Sapers: I don't have that number with me. The number is relatively few. But the complaints that do come in fall into two categories: complaints brought to us by the inmates about inappropriate searches of them, and complaints brought to us about inappropriate searches of family members or others coming in for visits.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Sure.

By relatively few, would you mean less than 100?

Mr. Howard Sapers: I can go back and get the numbers, and I'll make sure to inform the committee.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

From those contacts or inquiries or grievances, whatever you call them, do some ultimately get investigated?

● (1155)

Mr. Howard Sapers: Yes. Sometimes they're investigated in terms of their being harassment or inappropriate staff conduct. So they're not always captured as search issues simply. Sometimes they are complaints about a pattern of behaviour, where an inmate or an inmate's family member may feel harassed by correctional staff.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Have you ever found any of those grievances to be valid, and by valid I mean that there was a violation of the correctional services act?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Of the CCRA?

Yes. As a matter of fact, we have found cases of staff misconduct. However, our recommendations are not disciplinary in nature, so it's always about policy compliance. But we have certainly investigated complaints of staff misconduct and have found them to be grounded.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Would those be outlined in your annual report to Parliament or elsewhere, if I were really interested in researching this matter?

Mr. Howard Sapers: They are but only in the most general way. When we report our roll-up statistics, you'll see staff misconduct and harassment, discrimination complaints. You'll also—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: But it wouldn't be broken down into specific allegations of staff misconduct?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Not specifically in regard to searches.

However, I will draw your attention to a recent public interest report we issued that had to do with a lockdown and series of searches at a maximum security penitentiary in British Columbia over 10 days, where there were hundreds of incidents of use of force with firearms, and cell and strip searches. We made a series of observations and recommendations about the inappropriate use of firearms, the lack of compliance with policy on strip searches, and the lack of oversight in terms of the institution being locked down.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Can visitors file a grievance if they feel mistreated? Or can only a prisoner who invites that visitor into the facility file a grievance, if it's alleged that a visitor was mistreated?

Mr. Howard Sapers: A visitor can certainly bring a complaint to the Correctional Service. Typically, as far as my office is concerned, it's the inmate who would raise the issue with us on behalf of the visitor.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Sapers. It's nice to see you again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rathgeber. You're under your five minutes.

We'll now move to Mr. Sandhu, please.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you, Mr. Sapers, and Mr. Zinger, for being here this morning.

Before I start my questions, I would like to say that the New Democratic members of this committee are committed to finding cost-effective measures focused squarely on crime prevention and, ultimately, on community safety.

As we explore the issue of drugs and alcohol in our prisons, our goal is to find the most cost-effective ways to reduce drug use in prisons, but, ultimately, this must also include a focus on rehabilitation. We support interdiction measures if they are effective, but as we have heard on this committee, these programs show diminishing returns. Our priority should be a manageable corrections system that can deliver effective rehabilitation programs so that when prisoners are released, they are less likely to re-offend.

My first question is pretty direct. What provides the greatest return on actual investment when we're attempting to manage drug and alcohol abuse in prisons? Is it investment in rehabilitation or interdiction?

Mr. Howard Sapers: It's my view that there has to be a balance. It's actually more like a tripod than a two-legged stool. It's a combination of supply reduction, demand reduction, and harm reduction brings the best return.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I see from your report that we've had an increase in the amount of money being spent on interdiction in the last five years and yet a decrease in the rehabilitation programs and other intervention programs. What percentage would you say should be spent on rehabilitation programs?

Mr. Howard Sapers: I don't have a magic figure. I can tell you that my general concern is that we see, roughly speaking, 2% of the Correctional Service of Canada's overall budget being spent on core correctional programs. We don't think that's enough, and we base that on the participation rate of offenders in the programs.

On any given day, there may be less than 15% of incarcerated offenders actually engaged in a core correctional program. We know that the demand for those programs is there. We know there are waiting lists to get into these programs, and we know that delay in accessing these programs has tremendous implications for someone's re-integration potential and timely consideration of their conditional release. So we've encouraged the correctional service to put more emphasis on moving people into programs more quickly and ensuring their successful completion of those programs once they've entered them.

● (1200)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: So what you are saying is that we have wait lines for people to take these programs. What, in your opinion, are the leading problems that limit access to these programs?

Mr. Howard Sapers: It's physical capacity, simply put, in terms of program space; human resources capacity in terms of qualified personnel to deliver the programs; and mobility issues throughout the correctional system in terms of having offenders in the right security and right physical setting so they can gain access to programs. Right now there is a bit of a mismatch between where offenders are and what their security level is or where they are in the course of their sentence, and their ability to access those core correctional programs.

The positive news in this is that the correctional service has been piloting a new integrated correctional program model, which moves people into programs more quickly. We're waiting to see the evaluations of that model to make sure that program delivery is as valid and has the same impact as the core correctional programs it is replacing.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: We have a number of bills before the House. How effective will these newly introduced methods be in coping with the expected growth in the size and complexity of prison populations?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Again, there are a few facets to that question. The correctional services policy of dynamic security is a very good policy. That means you don't simply rely on static security, such as barriers, ion scanning, or gun towers, but you actually require your staff, including your security staff, to have a dynamic relationship with the offender population. That is the best way of being informed, having a safe environment, and having a most effective correctional environment. It also contributes to interdiction, and to people being motivated in terms of program uptake and successful completion of programs, and it also helps in terms of demand reduction.

So it is not simply a matter of needing more guards or higher walls if the numbers go up. It means you also have to have the capacity to maintain that policy of dynamic security, and grow your capacity to make sure that these wait lists for programs, et cetera, don't get any longer.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Sapers.

We will now move to Ms. Hoeppner, please.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both gentlemen for being here.

I want to go back to something you just said a few moments ago, Mr. Sapers, and go a little deeper into it, that individuals are on waiting lists to get into these programs, which later affect their applications for parole or other kinds of privileges then.

We've heard testimony about the fact there are programs with no measurement of whether they are successful in getting individuals off drugs and alcohol and no longer addicted.

In your experience, is there any kind of issue with inmates wanting to be part of these programs so they can check off these boxes and say they were part of a program, when there is really no way to measure, nor any accountability, as to whether they were truly successfully in completing these programs?

Mr. Howard Sapers: Every offender is given a correctional plan after intake and assessment. The Correctional Service of Canada prescribes the plans or programs. You have the men and women in the service who are doing those assessments and saying that they think the criminogenic needs of the prisoners will be addressed if the prisoners are in a particular substance abuse or cognitive program.

Offenders understand that successful progress against their correctional plan is what the parole board will be looking at. Of course it is a motivator; it is designed to be a motivator for them to be involved and engaged in those programs.

The problem seems to be getting into the program. Once you are in, completion rates tend to be pretty good, and the core correctional programs that I mentioned—the ones that are being replaced by the ICPM, the integrated correctional program model—have been very well validated. They do have an impact. They are not perfect, but they do have an impact. They have demonstrated their value.

If your question, simply put, is whether some inmates just want to play the game, sure they do. But that's not the general experience. The general experience is that they are prescribed a correctional plan and work to get into those programs. They understand that the parole board will be looking for program completion. We know that most releases from federal penitentiaries now are not as a result of a discretionary release by the parole board; they are a result of statutory release.

Much of the reason for that is that people are waiving and postponing their parole hearings because they have not been able to gain access to the programs, and so they know they are not going to be supported for parole.

● (1205)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: I appreciate that.

I think the point I'm wanting to make is that even in general society there are waiting lists for a lot of things that we're all entitled to. Unfortunately, for things like health care, sometimes people have to wait, and these are people who have not broken any laws.

In terms of policy—and here, Mr. Zinger, you mentioned the investment we have made in stopping drugs from getting into prisons—when I'm looking at ways we can suggest to improve the fight against drugs in prisons, programs are important. But I would like to make sure that we're putting taxpayers' dollars into programs that we can actually measure and can actually see are working.

So, exactly, I do appreciate that the programs for prisoners are a good motivator and were created to be a motivator, but I wonder at the same time how we make sure these programs are effective and would suggest that we measure them and not just say, well, it's successful because they completed it. We know that just completing a program isn't always a measure of success.

Dr. Ivan Zinger: The Correctional Service of Canada has developed its substance abuse program, for example, and I think we have to admit the current program is world class, in the sense that it has been accredited by a panel of international experts. It's been independently evaluated and the results are very positive: those who go through that program do lower their addiction issues and their recidivism rates, their reoffending rates. So that's all wonderful.

One of the issues that concerns us is that the Correctional Service of Canada currently is in the transition of moving from its existing, well-accredited, well-recognized programs into a new area, and this is what Mr. Sapers has referred to as that integrated correctional program model.

Historically, for example, the service would provide three types of programs in certain areas—for example, on substance abuse, family violence, and anger management. Each of them would take six months to complete. So if you had those three issues on your correctional plan, it would take you a year and a half to complete those programs.

This new integrated model collapsed all of these programs into one and gives only six months to address the three issues. What we worry about is that we don't know, and I don't believe the service knows, whether that new way of collapsing all of these things into one will be successful in reducing recidivism.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll move to Ms. Murray, please.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you for presenting here at the committee.

I'm new to this committee, so you'll have to bear with my questions as I try to understand the issue this study is about. One of the previous questioners talked about numbers of people in prison. I know that the statistic of 200% of capacity is being used to describe prisons in British Columbia.

Can you tell me how prison overcrowding impacts the goals of this study, essentially meaning rehabilitation, safety of correctional officers, and crime within institutions?

• (1210)

The Chair: And, more specifically, dealing with drugs and alcohol.

Mr. Howard Sapers: Prison crowding actually confounds just about everything that's positive about a correctional environment. Prison crowding leads to violence, bullying, intimidation, and gang activity. All of those things are related to the trade in contraband in an institution. Prison crowding is also dangerous for staff. Prison crowding also delays people's access and entry into programs. Again, it's just a capacity issue.

There is no positive side, no upside, to prison crowding. Of course, in federal penitentiaries prison crowding often leads to double-bunking, which is a significantly different issue from double-bunking in a provincial facility.

I don't want to get into a contest of who's running a better or worse system, but the average length of stay in a provincial facility is less than a month and a half, while the average length of stay in a federal facility is well over three years. If you're in a space that's designed for one person and you're living with somebody else and it's for more than four years, I think there's an order of magnitude difference. Of course, privacy issues and human dignity issues and even personal hygiene issues come into play, and all of that has a relationship to drug use and self-medication and contraband—and, again, to some of the other underground activities in institutions such as bullying, intimidation, or conscription of somebody else into an illegal activity inside the institution.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you. It sounds as though overcrowding has a direct impact upon the issue of drugs and alcohol use in prisons.

What I was hearing there is that some of the balance between demand reduction and harm reduction is out of whack right now, and that although there has been funding of one of the legs of the stool there are unfortunate wait times to enter programs, with people being released later than they might otherwise be released.

It sounds as though we have a downward spiral here whereby the absence of people in treatment, because of lack of capacity, is leading to more overcrowding, which then increases the problem.

In the discussion about capacity, is there one specific issue? Is the lack of qualified personnel or lack of capacity a pure dollar issue, or is it a training issue? Is it that there simply aren't people out there to fill all the spaces as our prison populations grow? Is it more the availability of money or of skill?

Mr. Howard Sapers: I think you have two general factors to consider. Number one is that we have seen growth in the federally sentenced inmate population. Roughly speaking, it's up by about 1,000 people this year over last. The system has not grown to the same extent. It is growing—there are lots of capital projects going on, lots of new cell space being constructed—but the system is playing catch-up. That's just one side of the equation, the physical housing space.

The other side of the equation is the recruitment and retention of professionals, from security officers through to psychologists through to program officers. Having those people in place, having them trained, and keeping them on the job is an ongoing problem for the correctional service. We see very unfortunate vacancy rates in psychology positions, for example.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Are these vacancy rates high because there's no money to fill them? Is that part of the attrition and the cost savings?

The Chair: We're going to, unfortunately, cut you off right here. We're over our five minutes.

The last questioning was good, in that I think you tried to tie it together with drugs. There may very well be other prison studies that we do here on issues such as funding and all that; but, more specifically, we want to try to stick to the difficulty of drugs in prison.

Anyway, we thank you for coming, and we appreciate your—

Ms. Joyce Murray: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, my comments were directly about the increase of drugs and alcohol in prisons, which I was hearing have to do with overcrowding and the capacity to treat people with drug and alcohol addictions. The causes of that, whether funding or training, are directly related to this downward spiral of drugs in prisons.

Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: It was a good question, Ms. Murray.

We will suspend for just a few moments and we will invite our other guests to come forward.

Thank you for coming. We look forward to your coming again.

•(1215) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1215)

The Chair: It's always difficult when we have lunch here and when we have bells and votes and everything else. So we apologize right off the top to our next witnesses, who are appearing in our second hour.

We will continue our study on the impact drugs and alcohol in prison have upon the rehabilitation of offenders, and also their impact on correctional officers and crime within institutions.

We have appearing before us in the second forty minutes Mr. Ken Snedden, acting assistant deputy commissioner for corporate services in Ontario, Correctional Service of Canada.

Appearing as an individual, we have William Normington, who will share his considerable experience with us. He is a retired Corrections Canada officer.

We welcome each of you. We look forward to your comments.

We'll begin with Mr. Snedden.

Mr. Kevin Snedden (Acting Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Corporate Services (Ontario), Correctional Service of Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the operational realities of managing issues related to drugs and alcohol within our federal penitentiaries.

By way of introduction, my name, as you said, is Kevin Snedden. Last spring I assumed my role as the acting assistant deputy commissioner of corporate services for the CSC in Ontario. Until then, I was the warden of Collins Bay Institution in Kingston, the second-oldest institution for male offenders in Ontario, behind Kingston Penitentiary. In fact, I took on the role of warden at Collins Bay exactly three years ago today. I'm not sure how that date keeps falling, but it seems to be eventful for me.

I should note, Mr. Chair, that my experiences as warden will inform most of my comments today.

Prior to taking command of Collins Bay Institution, and from my initial employment as a correctional officer in 1995, I've worked in institutions across Ontario and at the regional treatment centre in Kingston.

While at Collins Bay, I managed the retrofit of the institution, which initially began in 1999. The purpose of this retrofit was to provide a more open, dynamic security environment and to promote staff and offender interaction, which is an important tool in the detection and deterrence of drugs in our institutions.

The retrofit included four new living units, which were opened in 2008. Three of these units are 96-bed facilities focused on dynamic security. This design is one of the models being used for the institutional expansion currently under way across Canada.

It is interesting that the perimeter wall at Collins Bay Institution has remained relatively unchanged since its construction by offenders in the mid-1900s. Today, however, it is equipped with a fence detection system, staffed towers, and mobile patrols. Beyond

preventing offender escapes, these measures help prevent throw-overs of drugs and other contraband into the institution.

Mr. Chair, as the commissioner told you last week, the vast majority of offenders coming into our institutions have a dependency on drugs and/or alcohol. Substance abuse is usually at the root of the crime that landed them in the federal correctional system in the first place.

Substance abuse is the most important issue we must address if we are to help offenders move through their correctional plan and return to the community as productive, law-abiding citizens. Dealing with the issues of substance abuse is also important for the stability of our institutions across Canada. Addicted offenders are prone to violence and will seek any means necessary to feed their addiction. These factors put institutional staff, as well as the offender population, at risk.

So an important part of the job of any warden is to make sure that we are doing the best job we can to keep drugs out of the hands of offenders. This requires a multi-faceted approach that aims to reduce the demand for and supply of drugs and alcohol inside institutional walls.

Three years ago, CSC received \$122 million in funding over five years for the elimination of drugs in institutions. This money was geared towards enhancing institutional security.

At Collins Bay Institution, it was used to fund three key areas. The first was the addition of a security intelligence officer for us to better collect and analyze intelligence information regarding who might be involved in contraband activities and to take steps to mitigate their involvement. Secondly, we added another drug detector dog team to facilitate searches of cells, as well as of offenders, visitors, and contractors. Finally, we provided additional correctional officer resources to better manage the offender population.

These additional resources, combined with the hard work of the staff at Collins Bay Institution, have resulted in some impressive stories. Last spring, staff were completing a routine search of the recreation yard in the morning hours and discovered three packages of contraband in the yard, as well as one caught in the razor wire. A further search uncovered a total of eight packages containing marijuana, heroin, crack cocaine, and ecstasy, for an estimated total institutional value of approximately \$80,000.

Police and security intelligence officers worked together to investigate, and later that summer a suspect was arrested on his way back to Collins Bay Institution with similar packages. He has been prosecuted and has received a sentence of 30 months.

And just last month, one of our detector dog teams was searching inmate effects coming into the institution and gave a positive indication on a box. A subsequent search by staff uncovered gang-related clothing, as well as a television that had been stuffed with eight packages of a substance that was believed to be eight ounces of marijuana. This would amount to an estimated institutional value of approximately \$30,000.

● (1220)

The security and intelligence officers at Collins Bay Institution are currently investigating this matter, in partnership with the York Regional Police drugs and vice unit, and the Peel Regional Police intelligence services gang unit. We expect charges to be laid against the suspected sender of the package, who is a well-known, high-level Toronto drug dealer.

Mr. Chair, I'm proud of the hard work that front-line staff have undertaken to make our institutions safer places to work, and to create an environment that is more conducive to healing and rehabilitation. I am proud of the offenders in our custody who recognize the cycle of addiction, crime, and violence, and who are taking the necessary steps to address their substance issues.

During my time as warden, when an offender walked out my front door of Collins Bay Institution, I wanted to know that CSC had done everything it could to make sure I wouldn't see him coming back.

With the resources we have received to date and the efforts being undertaken at national headquarters, our regional offices, and institutions like Collins Bay, I am confident that we are making a positive difference.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Snedden.

We'll now look to Mr. Normington, please. Do you have an opening statement?

Mr. William Normington (As an Individual): Yes, sir.

Good afternoon. My name is Bill Normington and I've worked at a grassroots security level in Canadian prisons for over half of my life.

I can assure you that the problem with the introduction of drugs and alcohol getting into our prisons is nothing new, and that's the bad news. The good news, however, is that it can be fixed.

The key to the problem is highly motivated staff and a strong, supportive chain of command. When I began my employment in corrections, the majority of our staff were ex-military. I was tutored by veterans who encouraged me to engage offenders at every opportunity. This, of course, opened the door to communication with offenders and taught me the importance of dynamic security, lessons that should be encouraged in staff today.

The demographic has changed, but like the Canadian military of the late sixties, when trades personnel retired, a void of experience was created, and that's what we're experiencing now in corrections. Corrections is experiencing a similar void and there is a lack of older, experienced personnel to guide and encourage young officers, many of whom are not completing their function well. Many are text messaging while on duty, which in turn creates a lack of initiative to perform their function well and a failure on the part of correctional managers to effectively direct them.

To its credit, the government has attempted to provide the necessary tools required to have an impact on the problem. However, the most diligent officers are often discouraged, and the least productive are sometimes rewarded. The ion scanner, for example, is

a machine that detects particles of drugs on visitors or whoever would enter the institution. Particles of drugs that would normally ban a visitor from entering our institutions are often allowed by the shift supervisor who dismisses the positive results of the scanner, citing machine or operator error, which sounds pretty bad.

However, there are many things we can do to have an impact on this situation. The first thing we have to do is to motivate staff. We also have to communicate with more offenders dynamically. And we must have positive, experienced staff mentor our new recruits, and we should install cellphone blocks in our institutions. Our staff should be supported while they're trying to carry out their very difficult jobs. The tools that are given to us should be trusted and be used; they shouldn't be second-guessed. Finally, we should re-establish a chain of command.

I know these are simple solutions, but they will improve the situation now, and perhaps vastly in the future.

Thank you.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Normington.

We'll move into the first round of questioning with Mr. Norlock first.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Through you, Mr. Chair, to the witnesses, thank you very much for attending.

I'll start with Mr. Normington.

Mr. Normington, thank you for coming today. I realize that sometimes this place works pretty fast; usually it's pretty slow, in my view. We had quite a few witnesses. I'm sure Warden Snedden was assigned this task on very short notice, and the same with you, so thank you for coming.

I'll get right to the question. I was very concerned when I heard some of the last witnesses that we had before committee, particularly the Elizabeth Fry Society, say that every search of an inmate or a visitor, especially anything that was considered a so-called strip search, was a sexual assault.

Do you, number one, feel that those persons—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. Certain members keep trying to make the witnesses lie. I think this witness is entitled to his opinion. I do not understand why members are trying to undermine a testimony by questioning other witnesses. I do not see the relevance.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam.

That's not a point of order. I think the record will show what they said. In reality, Mr. Norlock's question is referencing someone else at a different meeting, but we can't expect these witnesses to have known that.

Mr. Norlock, continue. That was a good question. I think you are referencing something that was definitely given as testimony.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hope this time isn't counted against me. I did spend 30 years of my life in and out of courtrooms, so I know how to question a witness.

I guess what I'm asking is whether you ever considered that you had committed a sexual assault on someone you were assigned to search, or do you feel that any other Correctional Service of Canada officers are actually sexually assaulting persons when they're conducting such a search?

• (1230)

Mr. William Normington: In 35 years' of experience, I've never run into that. I've never run into any offender who has been sexually assaulted by officers doing professional cavity searches.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

In your testimony you also made reference to some of the new tools the government has provided to correctional officers. I know that you still have friends who work at one of Canada's largest prisons. Do you feel that these new tools add to personal safety?

Second, in your opinion, when a person feels safer, do you believe that he or she is free to do a better job, meaning a more thorough and effective job during the course of their work?

The Chair: Let me just interrupt again here and say that tools in relation to drugs and alcohol are the focus.

So to both sides, the government and the opposition side, our focus is not on expanding prisons. It's not on anything other than drugs and alcohol, their ability to prevent rehabilitation, and just how they're getting in there, and the safety of correctional officers.

Continue, please, on the tool aspect.

Mr. William Normington: Well, an example is the ion scanner. When the ion scanner is used, there's no doubt in my mind that the machine doesn't make errors. We can detect on the individuals who come in, on their wallets or their jewellery or their clothing, quantities of drugs. We can detain them until the authorities come and arrest them with probable cause, or we can ask them to leave the institution. That has eliminated one problem. But what happens is that individuals come in for visits. They mule in their drugs, if you will. They are passed off. As soon as they get into V&C, the visitors and correspondence area, it's almost impossible to detect and recover them.

So, yes, those tools are invaluable and make the environment a safer environment to work in.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

We also heard testimony from some witnesses about a recent Supreme Court decision on so-called safe injection sites. There are certain people, such as the police chief in Ottawa, who believe that

the state is providing permission for people to use illegal and illicit drugs.

In your experience, have you ever encountered programs where apparatus or needles were provided? How did that work out?

Mr. William Normington: The idea of providing needles within prison makes no sense at all. Invariably what will happen is that the needles will be misused. They'll be used as weapons. Large numbers of needles will go missing. It will just create havoc; it will just create security problems within the facility. I don't think that's a good idea. I would think it would be a failure to try to introduce something like that into our prisons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Normington, and Mr. Norlock.

We'll now move to Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Thank you very much, and thanks to both of the witnesses for appearing on short notice.

I particularly want to thank Mr. Normington for bringing the perspective of the rank and file corrections officer. It's not something we've heard before at the committee, and I think what you had to say about the importance of mentoring in a positive work environment is a good addition to what we've heard here. I thank you for focusing on that.

Would you say that the best approach to reducing the harm of drugs in prison is to focus on one thing, like interdiction, or staff morale, or rehabilitation, or would a balanced approach to those be necessary?

Mr. William Normington: It certainly has to be a balanced approach. One thing isn't going to resolve the problem.

Right now with the amount of drugs that criminals are trying to introduce into our prisons, we should be directing a lot of money and resources towards that. As an example, at Warkworth Institution, there are six ways that drugs are being introduced into the institution. We know that. We don't have the resources to have people there at the times they're brought in. That's an ongoing thing, and it isn't unusual. The deployment study of our staff has almost handcuffed our supervisors' ability to deploy staff. There are many instances where drugs can be brought into the institution. We don't have the staff to prevent it.

• (1235)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you, Mr. Normington.

For Mr. Snedden, I really welcome the statement on page five of your submission about requiring a multi-faceted approach that aims to reduce both demand and supply.

I have two questions for you. One, do you feel that you receive proportionate resources for the multi-faceted parts of this, or have you had disproportionate resources for one? My second question was just prompted by Mr. Normington. If you had more resources for interdiction, would you continue to get the same kind of returns from applying additional resources in that area?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: Just on the first question, the term you used was a “proportionate” allocation of resources. I'm not sure of the definition one would use there, but I can give you my operational sense as a warden. As I mentioned in my opening statement, at Collins Bay I have received resources for additional multi-function posts and detector dogs, which are typically seen on the interdiction side of things. But those also have benefits on the other side of the house, because those staff, especially the intelligence people, work with my program delivery officers and parole officers in key work areas with offenders.

So with regard to the issue of proportionality, I do think we're being balanced. I have interdiction tools, but I also have program delivery staff and parole officers, and we bring them together in a cohesive manner to try to coordinate all of their roles. I view the institution as a city: we have to provide all sorts of different services. Think of any small municipality. Anything a municipality has to provide, I have to figure out how to do within the confines of those 30-foot limestone walls. And we do that in an integrated fashion.

I can't really give you an answer that there's this much here, and this much there, because they're all intertwined. If I take one piece out, the rest of it collapses. I must have that integrated approach and I think we are doing that at Collins Bay. Every morning at my ops meeting, we read out observation reports from the 24-hour period before. Issues are brought up around contraband being seized and whether or not we know the individual the product was going to. It doesn't end there, as my program delivery officers and parole officers get involved. We really take that multi-faceted approach.

On the second part of your question about more resources, we'd always like to have more. I think we're trying to be as effective and as efficient with what is being provided to us—and, again, doing so in that balanced way.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Your testimony did say that you've taken a lot of measures. I guess to really focuses my question, do you believe there's a lot more you could do in interdiction that would produce value? Or, given that you need to be multi-faceted, could you use more funding in the other areas at this point?

The Chair: It will have to be quick.

Mr. Kevin Snedden: Just quickly, yes, we always could use more, specifically around interdiction. I think every dollar we get, we put to maximum use. At Collins Bay I think we've done a pretty good job of being balanced at this point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garrison, and Mr. Snedden.

We'll now move to Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

We've heard quite a bit about the balance. I think everybody would tend to agree that it's a clear-cut message for us.

If we were to just deal in hypotheticals for a moment and say that we had the perfect balance of programming and addictions counselling and treatment, and a perfect balance of interdiction, would it be accurate to say there would still be a drug issue, to a certain degree, within the institutions?

• (1240)

Mr. Kevin Snedden: I think that would be accurate.

I mean, you strive for perfection. As Mr. Sapers said, we've set a lofty goal for ourselves, and that's one of the things that I think Canadians can take pride in. In our organization we do set those goals. You heard from the commissioner last week about other countries that come and visit and take a look at our stuff. As a warden, I guide those delegations around.

But we don't rest on that. We don't rest on our laurels. We strive to ever improve.

In a hypothetical world of boundless possibilities and resources, I think if we applied absolutely everything we could, then ideally we would be at that zero level. Ultimately, that is my goal as a warden, to have no contraband in my institution whatsoever. As to the reality of that, it's still our goal. Whether or not we'll ever be able to make it to that absolute zero, I would say in practical terms that maybe we'll never get to absolute zero, but I'm going to strive to get as close to that as humanly possible.

Mr. Ryan Leef: From the perspective of that goal then, we can strive for perfection and recognize that probably there will always be a percentage of drugs in the institution. But I'll just put out the point—if you want to comment on it as well—that a small percentage of people bringing drugs into the institution or accessing and utilizing drugs has a huge impact on the larger percentage of those who want to take programs on positive behavioural change.

We have heard a bit of testimony about false positives in the ion scanner and some testimony about false positives with dogs' recognition of drugs. Could you maybe speak to us a bit about the significance of having those things, while respecting that fact that they can create some false indications, and the importance from your perspective and experience of the appearance of non-tolerance of that?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: I think it's an important part of it. It's an important deterrent to have that.

The ion scanner is a machine. If it's operating properly and operated properly by the operator, it's a very reliable tool. To guard against things like false positives, we'll run second tests and things of that nature. It's a piece of information that we'll consider when we do our threat risk assessment. If we do get a high hit on an ion scanner or some hits over the threshold, we'll do a threat risk assessment and try to bring all of the information we have to bear to make a decision to safeguard against those false positives. But not having that machine in the first place or our detector dogs would be detrimental to our goal of trying to keep drugs out of the institution.

As warden, I try to reinforce with staff that these are tools in our tool box. We have to apply them. We do so with dignity and respect toward those who are entering our institutions. We follow our policies that have been established to guard against things like false positives and things of that nature. We don't just believe the box, to the effect that "As the box says, I will do". No, it's a human business and we apply human judgment in a policy context to what those readings are.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Are staff subject to pre-screening with the ion scanner and the dogs?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: For staff, no, we don't use the ion scanners and dogs.

When I walk into the institution in the morning, for example, I go through a similar process that visitors to this building would go through with metal detectors. All my baggage, my briefcase, and things of that nature are all scanned through an X-ray machine.

Mr. Ryan Leef: But other staff are not?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: No, everybody is.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Oh, everybody is, okay. Sorry, I didn't hear that correctly.

Can you quickly tell us about the inmates' accounts and what the maximum dollar value is that inmates are allowed to have in an account within the institution, how money is allowed to be transferred, and what role that plays with drugs?

The Chair: Please be very quick.

Mr. Kevin Snedden: Very quickly, inmates basically have two accounts: their current account, which is like a chequing account; and then a savings account.

Offenders who earn money in the institution through inmate labour get their pay; it's a cashless process, all handled through computer. A portion of their pay cheque must go into their savings account for planning for the future and eventual release. The other portion is allowed to go into their current account.

Family members and people of that nature can send money to the institution. All of those moneys must go into their savings account, and in a fiscal year they're allowed four transfers from their savings to their current accounts, to a maximum of \$500.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much for being here to testify today. I appreciate your comments.

I have a couple of questions. One has to do with your comment that the effort has been very successful since \$122 million was put into drug and alcohol interdiction programs, and you gave some good examples of that. Could you tell me what the evidence of the success is? What was the rate of the presence or use of illegal substances in your facility beforehand, and what is the volume or rate of drug and alcohol presence or use in the prison now?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: I can't give you a rate off the top of my head. What I can say is what I reported on October 6, 2008. Our focus has been on both providing the program to our offenders as well interdiction. One of the key areas we've been focusing on, other than our principal interest, has been the throw-overs that I mentioned in the opening statement. We're getting more intelligence, as a measures of success.

Ms. Joyce Murray: I'm just wondering what the evidence is, because you're saying that you want to get to zero drugs and alcohol in the prison, or close to it. We've heard before that it's perhaps not realistic, but idealistic. I would expect that you have some evidence to support your view that this is an effective way of reducing drug and alcohol use.

Mr. Kevin Snedden: The one indicator is the seizures. Everything I've managed to interdict isn't in my population.

The other thing that we look at is urinalysis.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Sorry, excuse me. That's really not evidence; that's anecdotal.

Mr. Kevin Snedden: It's anecdotal.

So from a more strategic or results-based standpoint, as a warden, one of the indicators I watch is my urinalysis stats.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Sorry, your what stats?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: The random urinalysis stats. On a random basis, we do urinalysis testing of 5% of the population. At Collins Bay when I first arrived, we had a relatively high refusal rate, albeit I can't remember the percentage off the top of my head. So between our positives and our refusals, we had a significant number. That's a concern for a warden because, if nothing is going to be anything detected, I'm concerned why they're refusing.

One of the positive outcomes that indicates to me that we're having an impact is that we've seen an improvement in our urinalysis results; there are fewer positives and substantially fewer refusals.

Ms. Joyce Murray: There may be other reasons for those fewer refusals. I would image there may be other consequences, or carrots, or sticks.

Here's a comment by Dr. Julio Montaner, one of the world's leading researchers for HIV/AIDS treatment and now prevention. His model has been adopted by China as a whole. His comment is that the best way to prevent HIV/AIDS infections is to have fewer people in prison. We did hear that it's seven to ten times more likely for a person to be living with HIV/AIDS, with all of the attendant costs for our health system, if they've been in prison than the general population.

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Point of order.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Well, this is about drugs.

Ms. Wai Young: I don't see how AIDS is about drugs. I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm going to give a little latitude to Ms. Murray.

• (1250)

Ms. Joyce Murray: One of the primary causes of HIV—

The Chair: Madam Murray, I'm speaking now.

Part of what we are looking at is needle exchanges, the use of needles, and hepatitis. All those things may be part of it, but again our discussion is on drugs and alcohol in prisons.

Continue, Mr. Snedden, or Ms. Murray, whoever it was—

Ms. Joyce Murray: I was actually asking a question.

Considering that a major cause of HIV/AIDS is dirty needles and that we know that drugs are in the prisons and prisoners are using drugs, my question has to do with overcrowding of prisons. For British Columbia that's especially of concern.

Does overcrowding frustrate the human resource goals that you have, Mr. Normington? Does it impact on the ability to have mentoring, training, the kind of support, interaction, engagement needed with offenders? Does the density of prisoners in a prison affect that?

The other question, Mr. Snedden, is whether overcrowding, from your perspective, in any way affects the work you're trying to do to reduce the amount of drugs in the prison.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murray.

Unfortunately, he won't have time to answer the question because we're well over the time allotted.

We'll move back to the New Democrats, and Mr. Chicoine.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Good afternoon. Thank you to the two witnesses for being here. It is much appreciated.

A lot has been said about the balanced ways in which to combat the presence and use of drugs in prison. Over the past few years, more money has been injected to provide correctional officers with more tools to prevent drugs from entering the prison. I think there has also been over the past few years, an increase in the number of programs to help inmates deal with their addiction to drugs.

I would like you to say a few words about the effectiveness of these two measures. You spoke of the increased number of tools. That was quite good. Some seem to be working and seem to mean that fewer drugs are circulating in the prisons.

I would like you to elaborate on the increase, over the years, of the programs available in prison, to verify the effectiveness of the two approaches. I would like you to provide more detail on both approaches. Do you think increasing both is a good thing? Is a little more money needed to prevent drugs from entering the prison? If not, should there be an emphasis on programs, which still seem to be lacking? I would like your assessment of these two approaches which I consider to be balanced.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Snedden: Regarding the introduction of drugs, as I've mentioned, we've had some instances where we've seized drugs and seen a reduction in our positive urinalysis and refusal rates.

With respect to increasing programs, I can speak specifically for Collins Bay. We have increased the number of program delivery officers who provide our core programming. I'm not an expert in it, but as Mr. Sapers mentioned, the organization is piloting a new model for program delivery.

The other thing at Collins Bay as well is that we've had a lot of focus on the program side. The program side isn't just about offenders sitting in substance abuse programs, but also about trade skills, education, and things of that nature. It's a multi-faceted approach that I'm proud of at Collins Bay. So far this fiscal year, for core programming, I think we've had approximately 154 men complete a program. On any given day, we have 166 offenders enrolled in our school. During the last fiscal year we had two graduations and, I believe, we had 48 men receive their grade 12 education. They came into our system without it. We also have an industry shop run through CORCAN Industries that has a welding certification program. It's an accredited training delivery agent and the inmates are getting certificates in level one and level two welding. And just anecdotally, of the eleven gentlemen who have taken part in that program and been released, seven of them have secured employment in the community in a related field.

I don't have the level of detail with me to give you a specific example of a particular inmate doing this and that happened. But as the warden of the institution, I can say that having from that balanced approach and looking at the programs, the education, and vocational training as a whole, we're seeing improvements in the ability of our men to get education in the institution and for us to get the number of programs that we need delivered.

I don't have my waiting lists with me, but I know that we've been working on them. Mr. Sapers has mentioned them. Those waiting lists are coming down at Collins Bay Institution, so we have fewer people waiting to get them. We're seeing positives in a number of different areas there.

I don't know if that entirely answers your question or not.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Yes, very well. It was just a question of assessing the situation. There has been an increase in the money allocated to all this.

Let us say that your institution needed even more. Hypothetically speaking, an additional \$50 million in resources is injected. In order to decrease drug abuse in prison, where should we be investing that money? Should it be directed more toward monitoring, programs, or both in a balanced approach? Where would you invest that money? If you had full discretion for allocating that money in any way you saw fit, what would you do?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Snedden: In a hypothetical world where somebody came and said here is x number of dollars to divide as you wish, my answer would be that I was not sure. I'd have to take a step back and look at what I already had and divide it up. I go back to the need for a balanced approach. I think it's a little misleading when we get down into the dollar figures, that is, x number of dollars for this and x number of dollars for that.

Through reinvestment Collins Bay has received some additional resources for program delivery. I think you have to be careful about trying to equate every activity on a dollar value, because we have been able to do some things and produce results without the dollar values always having to be equal. The anecdotal part of that has to do with integrating both sides of the house so that we don't look at the world in silos. We need to blend those silos between interdiction programs, parole officers, and education. I think we're achieving that goal so that all of the moneys are about drug interdiction, versus hiving them off individually.

Some of the other witnesses commented on individuals who may have got into trouble and been removed from a program because they went to segregation. I've had cases at Collins Bay where in the morning we have had an observation report by staff indicating that such and such an offender is decompensating. Spontaneously, without the warden's having to tell the staff what to do, we'll have staff from the program side of the house, the security side of the house, and supervisory staff saying what needs to be done. We may have a program delivery officer who has a rapport with this gentleman and might be able to bring multi-disciplinary resources to bear. That integration is happening at Collins Bay without my having to prescribe it artificially. To me that shows that integration is working.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to give a little time to Mr. Aspin.

And for committee members, Ms. Hoepfner wants to bring up a point at the end.

Mr. Aspin.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm a new member and this is not my field of expertise. I appreciate your coming. I have learned a lot from your testimonies this morning.

I'm interested, Mr. Snedden, in your comments about bank accounts for prisoners. We've heard a lot about drugs and currency in prisons. I'm curious about whether bank accounts would help prisoners dealing drugs. Are you able to monitor their accounts, or is this a rights issue? Can you comment on bank accounts and their ability to facilitate transactions?

Mr. Kevin Snedden: It's been my experience that because the approved institutional accounts held by the offenders have a transfer limit of no more than \$500, they don't play a significant role. They're not providing them access to moneys. We do monitor their accounts. If they have moneys coming in from various sources that we have concerns or suspicions about, we'll refer those types of things to police authorities. We do have a number of limits and constraints around the offender bank accounts. The potential is there to use those funds to buy canteen items and things like those and then use them as a currency; but, again, we can monitor their spending and the moneys in their accounts.

In a world of technology, doing your banking through a third party in the community is the preferred option. Our intelligence folks could give you a much more articulate explanation about the black market and the drug subculture. I can just give you my personal perspective and experience as warden. With telephone and Internet banking, if I'm going to purchase narcotics from you, you would simply give me the price and I'd have to get a hold of my wife, girlfriend, or community contact to move the money to the bank account number you provided me with. The money would then get moved in the community, where it's somewhat beyond the purview of the Correctional Service of Canada.

That said, because we have the intelligence capacity and do cell searching and things of that nature, we do glean intelligence of these types of things and are then able to work with police partners to track down the movement of money. We do try to combat that.

• (1300)

Mr. Jay Aspin: Another thing, Mr. Chairman, that I was curious about was Mr. Sapers's comment that elements of a coherent and comprehensive anti-drug strategy should have performance indicators. He suggested a number of them. We spend \$120 million to attack this problem.

Could you comment briefly on what kind of indicators are there now and whether they are annual metrics?

The Chair: Thank you. We're right at the end of your time.

Could you give a quick answer, please.

Mr. Kevin Snedden: We do try to look at results and track them around seizures, urinalysis rates, and homemade alcohol production. The commissioner mentioned that as you see drugs decreasing, you sometimes see the latter increasing. So we do watch all of those types of indicators to try to have as best an assessment as we can about the results for our dollars.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hoepfner, you have a piece of committee business perhaps.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes, I know we had a brief discussion as a committee about possibly doing some travel in relation to this study. I think from the testimony we've heard so far, if we are all in agreement and our whips are in agreement, it might be beneficial to go to Kingston to meet and talk with some of the investigators there who are working on the drug problem—not just in the prisons but also outside.

If the rest of the committee is in agreement with that, Mr. Chair, I am wondering if you could look into making those arrangements when we come back after the Thanksgiving break.

The Chair: We would do that on a day trip. Is that what I'm to understand?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: That's what I think we could do.

The Chair: Mr. Sandhu, you wanted to speak to this.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: We wouldn't want to talk only to the investigators, but also to the prisoners themselves in regard to drug use.

The Chair: Okay. We'll see if we can do it. Sometimes there are issues around that. They do have reps within institutions who may speak to you. Because we are limiting it to the drug aspect, I'm not

certain if the representation from the offender population is involved in those kinds of things. We can check to see what is possible. The point is well taken, not just to see and talk to a couple of correctional officers and look at a prison, but also to speak and meet with those who are involved in this type of thing.

Do I have consensus that is something you'd be interested in doing? Any opposed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right. It looks like we have direction on that for after the break.

To our two guests who appeared after lunch today, we thank you for coming and for your input. I would also add that if you've thought of an answer to a question that you feel you should have said, please feel free to send in a written response as well, and we'll see that it's circulated to the members.

● (1305)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Is there any response to my question? I was cut off about overcrowding and would welcome your answer.

The Chair: Yes, any response would be welcome.

The meeting is adjourned.

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