

World Sickle Cell Day- June 19, 2017

Hon. Jane Cordy's Statement in the Senate- June 20th 2017

Hon. Jane Cordy: Honourable senators, for some, the pain strikes without warning — sharp, stabbing and sudden. For others, the pain never really goes away. It is a pain that is very difficult to live with day in and day out. One woman described the pain as having childbirth pain every day.

Honourable senators, this is the life of a person with sickle cell disease. Sickle cell is the most common genetic disease in the world. It is estimated that over 5,000 Canadians live with sickle cell.

Sickle cell can affect those from any ethnic background but it is most common among those with roots in the Mediterranean, particularly Greece and Italy, the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean.

Honourable senators, yesterday I was privileged to be invited to attend the celebration of World Sickle Cell Day at the Toronto General Hospital. It was wonderful to see many of the people I had met previously at sickle cell events on Parliament Hill. It was also an honour to meet the doctors, the nurses and the medical staff who are doing so much for those with sickle cell. Of course, the patients who shared their stories of living with the disease were remarkable.

I spoke with young women, like Tanya, now a nurse, and Josephine, who have lived with sickle cell their entire lives. Another patient, Sherman Moore, spoke of emergency room experiences where he had to wait for long hours before being treated, even though it is more effective to be treated for the pain before it begins. He conveyed to me that he believes sickle cell patients should be treated with logic and compassion.

Honourable senators, this would give dignity and care to the patient and it would save the system many dollars.

While I was in Toronto, I also had the chance to visit the Sickle Cell and Thalassemia Clinic at the Toronto General Hospital. The clinic treats over 700 sickle cell patients, many of whom come regularly for blood transfusions. Dr. Jacob Pendergrast and his medical team are excellent health care providers.

Honourable senators, yesterday was an exceptional day. It was my privilege to meet with sickle cell patients and their families and to witness the fine work at the sickle cell clinic. I am delighted to have had the chance to tour these facilities and to speak with so many in the sickle cell community.

We know that donating blood can save the lives of many who require it in the treatment of numerous diseases or in emergency situations. Sickle cell patients especially require frequent blood transfusions. One of the themes of yesterday's event was the importance of giving blood. Blood donations can make life better for those with sickle cell and, indeed, blood donations save lives.

Honourable senators, last night the CN Tower was lit in red and white in recognition of World Sickle Cell Day for the very first time. That was pretty special. I would like to thank Lanre Tunji-Ajayi, the president and director general of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada. She was described yesterday as a "package of awesomeness," and that is a very appropriate description.

Honourable senators, it is important that we continue the discussion about sickle cell disease.