

LETTERS

Heroin history

This letter is in response to the article by Lucas Richert in *CMAJ*.¹ In the 1890s, diacetylmorphine was resynthesized at Bayer and then for almost 20 years, it was marketed as heroin, a safe and nonaddicting substitute for morphine. I first learned this while reading Goodman and Gilman's "*The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*"² in 1959 while I was a medical student at the University of British Columbia; this led to a repeatedly reaffirmed life-long skepticism of claims made by drug companies.

Because heroin generally has fewer adverse effects than morphine, however, legalization for end-of-life use in patients with intractable pain would be a useful addition to our limited armamentarium. Apart from lessening suffering, it could allow some patients to delay or avoid assisted suicide.

Because heroin and fentanyl are already easily available on the street, there is no risk of worsening law enforcement or mortality issues related to illicit drug use.

G. Frank O. Tyers MD

Clinician, Vancouver Coastal Health,
Vancouver, BC

■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2018 February 5;190:E144.
doi: 10.1503/cmaj.733520

References

1. Richert L. Heroin in the hospice: opioids and end-of-life discussions in the 1980s. *CMAJ* 2017; 189:E1231-2.
2. Goodman LS, Gilman A. *The pharmacological basis of therapeutics: a textbook of pharmacology, toxicology, and therapeutics for physicians and medical students*. 1st ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing; 1941.

Competing interests: None declared.