

HONGKONG.

REPORTS ON MORPHINE INJECTION.

Laid before the Legislative Council by Command of His Excellency the Governor, on the 12th September, 1893.

Colonial Surgeon to Colonial Secretary.

GOVERNMENT CIVIL HOSPITAL,
HONGKONG, 14th July, 1893.

SIR,

In accordance with instructions contained in your minute of the 26th ultimo, I requested Dr. ATKINSON to give me a report of a case of Morphia injection by Chinese that came under his notice in the Government Civil Hospital and also requested Mr. CROW, Government Analyst, to ascertain, if possible, the preparation of Morphia used and the strength of the solutions from the samples forwarded, and also to procure samples direct for himself, if possible, and get all the information he could generally as to the practice of Morphia injection among the Chinese. These reports I now forward. Mr. CROW's report is a very complete one and leaves no doubt upon the subject.

Enclosure No. 1.

Enclosure No. 2.

The dose used as it appears quite commonly of gr. $\frac{1}{2}$ of Morphia in solution is a very full one and very rarely used by a medical practitioner; to allay even very acute pain a $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of a grain are the doses most commonly used. It will be seen by this that the dose used among the Chinese is a very full one. This supposed cure for Opium smoking is the introduction of an undoubtedly pernicious habit for one that, as I have proved, is a very doubtful one and easily cured with no evil effects to the patient by complete deprivation at once. To deprive these men of the habit at once of using Morphia injections will cause much suffering, not only nervous exhaustion for want of the stimulant, but in the majority of cases it will result in an attack of profuse diarrhoea very difficult to control and will result in a sort of Cholera scare.

Morphia injection is used ostensibly for the cure of Opium smoking, but from the evidence given there is no attempt whatever to decrease the strength of the injections; but on the contrary the number of doses taken appears to increase and the evidence points to the introduction of a habit well known to be an undoubtedly pernicious habit for one that is to say the most of it a very doubtfully pernicious one.

The profit side of the question is the only one likely to be looked upon by those who conduct the cure. It is shown to be from 200 to 400 per cent., and as long as they make such a profit there is little chance of their patients being cured.

I am of opinion that it is of little use striking at the sale of the drug or the instruments used as there are European Agencies for these in all the principal Chinese towns. The only way will be to strike at the shops in which it is practised, the same as gambling houses, and the punishments should be severe and refer only to the keepers.

At the same time provisions will have to be made to meet the evils which will arise from this stoppage amongst those that have contracted the habit which might be done by a notification by the Registrar General that medicines can be obtained from the European hospitals and dispensaries and also from Police Stations the same as has been done in regard to Cholera Cases.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

PH. B. C. AYRES,
Colonial Surgeon.

The Honourable
THE COLONIAL SECRETARY.

Enclosure No. 1.

Government Analyst to Colonial Surgeon.

No. 12.

GOVERNMENT LABORATORY,
HONGKONG, 1st July, 1893.

SIR,

My attention was first called to the practice of Morphine injecting among the Chinese about a month ago by Dr. ATKINSON, when handing me a bottle of liquid alleged to have been prepared for subcutaneous injection which on analysis proved to be a solution of Hydrochlorate of Morphine.

2. At my request our Compradore, Mr. Hoo A Choo, brought me, about a month ago, a victim of this pernicious habit who volunteered the following statement:—

“My name is CHU A YEE. I am a barber, and am 28 years of age. The marks on my arms and thighs are caused by a needle used for inserting medicine. I took the medicine for the first time in this way in October last. At first I had two injections daily, one in the morning and one in the evening. Afterwards, when I had diarrhoea and pains in the stomach, I had one or two injections more. After using the injections for three months, my arm used to be very stiff at night. I am now having four or five injections daily. Have had two this morning (12 noon). At first I paid two cents for each injection. I now only pay one cent. I had the injections in the first place because I was told by many people that they would cure me of the opium habit. Have not smoked any opium since October 1892. Up to that date I had been an opium smoker for more than a year. I felt better when I smoked opium than I do now. I used to get medicine injected at the *Chun Tak-tong, drug shop, Wyndham Street*. They were made this morning by CHAN MUI YUK, Queen's Road Central.”

3. I may mention that the man on that date weighed 112 lbs. He appeared somewhat dazed.

4. Thinking it would be useful to have some information as to the strength of the Morphine solution I requested Mr. Hoo A Choo to obtain a supply. He forwarded it to me on Sunday last. I then requested him to send the actual purchaser to my Office. The man came on the 29th ultimo. He was the barber referred to in paragraph 2. His appearance had certainly not improved. Weight 107 lbs.—a loss of 5 lbs. within a month. He said that he had had three injections that day.

5. He made the following statement:—

“On the 25th June, Mr. Hoo A Choo gave me \$1.30 to buy some medicine. I went to Tsing Lok Hin, 87, Queen's Road West, and saw the man who had given me injections on a former occasion. I asked him to let me have some of the medicine he uses. He filled the bottle (one fluid ounce) I had with me and charged 20 cents for it. I handed the bottle to MAK KAU.”

6. MAK KAU informed me that he handed this bottle to Mr. Hoo A Choo personally.

7. Submitted to analysis this solution yielded 2 % of Morphine=2.5 % of the Hydrochlorate or Muriate, the commonest commercial salt of this alkaloid.

8. The solid preparation handed to me by Dr. ATKINSON a few days ago proved to be Hydrochlorate of Morphine.

9. It appeared to me desirable to have ocular proof of this practice. Accordingly accompanied by Mr. CHAU KAM-TSÜN, one of my assistants, I went to No. 87, Queen's Road West, yesterday morning. I directed him to go upstairs and ask the man in charge if he would allow me to visit his establishment. No objection being offered, I entered and observed three men asleep on mats, and about 12 or 15 standing in the verandah. Some of the men, I was informed, had just had injections; the others were waiting their turn. There were numerous puncture scars on their arms. I saw two operations performed. In one case about 15 minims, and in the other case about 20 minims were injected. The operator informed me that there was a limit as to the number of minims he injected and that the quantity used depended on the amount of opium his patients had been in the habit of smoking. The Syringe used was a good instrument of American manufacture. The operation was performed in the usual way and after each injection the needle was wiped with a dirty rag. The operator said, he prepared the solution himself from a powder purchased at a European Pharmacy and showed me an empty bottle labelled "Muriate of Morphine, Poison."

10. I may here mention that this injecting business is a profitable undertaking. I understand the Chinese can buy Hydrochlorate of Morphine locally at \$2.50 per ounce (437.5 grains). From this quantity 875 injections each containing half a grain of Morphine Hydrochlorate could be prepared. This would leave a profit of \$6.25 on each ounce of Morphine at a charge of 1 cent for each injection. If $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of a grain were used at each injection the profit would be about \$10.00.

11. There can be no two opinions as to the baneful nature of this practice, and no effort should be spared to stop it forthwith.

12. The Ordinance should be made as sweeping as possible. A saving clause in favour of practitioners registered under Ordinance No. 6 of 1884 would, I presume, be necessary. Native practitioners holding diplomas granted by the College of Medicine for Chinese should not be exempted from the operation of the Bill. Having regard to the profitable character of the business, as set forth in paragraph 10, the temptation to take up the practice of injecting Morphine would be great indeed.

13. At the same time something should, I think, be done to relieve the sufferings of those now having injections if the practice is made illegal. These men will be in a terrible state when the injections are discontinued.

14. Would it not be possible to supply from this Department some powerful stimulant and tonic such as Cinchona and Aromatic Spirit of Ammonia to all victims of the injection habit on application?

15. These wretched creatures will not be able to satisfy the inevitable craving by a return to opium smoking. I said to the man CHU A YEE on the 29th ultimo — "Why don't you stop it? You will die if you go on at this rate." He replied "How can I? I am a poor man and can't afford to buy opium for smoking. If I smoke opium again it will cost me twice as much as it did before."

16. Poverty on the one hand and the exorbitant charge made by the Opium Farmer for the smoking extract on the other are in my opinion the chief causes of the introduction of this practice.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

W. EDWARD CROW,
Government Analyst.

The COLONIAL SURGEON,

&c.,

&c.,

&c.

HONGKONG.

REPORTS ON MORPHINE INJECTION.

(In continuation of No. 30 of 1893.)

Laid before the Legislative Council by Command of His Excellency the Governor, on the 12th September, 1893.

(Opium Farmers to Colonial Treasurer.)

HONGKONG, 24th May, 1893.

SIR,

The Prepared Opium Ordinance of 1891, section 10, provides for the preparation and sale of prepared opium, and the word "preparation" by the interpretation clause in the Ordinance is stated thus: "the subjecting of opium of any kind to any degree of artificial heat, for any purpose whatever shall be taken to be the preparing of such opium."

In the latter part of section 10 it is provided "that no medical practitioner, chemist or druggist, not being a Chinese, or being such and having a European or American diploma, shall be prevented from preparing or selling opium *bonâ fide* for medical purposes."

Within the last few months a number of establishments have been opened in Hongkong, to which those who have acquired the habit of opium-smoking have been induced to resort for the purpose of having a preparation of opium administered by means of subcutaneous injections. As the charge made for each injection is very small, large numbers of Chinese have been induced to frequent these houses, and, we believe, that a considerable diminution in the receipts of the Farm arising from the sale of prepared opium for local consumption has been owing to this cause. Under these circumstances we would ask you to be good enough to suggest to the Government either some modification of the law with reference to the sale of preparations of opium, or else that a law might be passed making the subcutaneous injection of drugs, except under certain restrictions and by a duly qualified medical man, a punishable offence.

We are informed that a large number of persons have been seriously injured in their health by having recourse to the places above mentioned, and as the practice is at the same time likely to affect permanently the revenue of the Colony as well as the present Opium Farmers, we feel justified in urging you to bring the matter to the serious attention of the Colonial Government.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servants,

HAU FOOK COMPANY,
Opium Farmers.

The Honourable N. G. MITCHELL-INNES,

Colonial Treasurer,

&c.,

&c.,

&c.

(Minute by Assistant Registrar General.)

HONOURABLE REGISTRAR GENERAL,

Apparently the practice of injecting Morphia has arisen only within the last few months.

Injections can be obtained at the following places :—

- 312, Queen's Road West.—A branch open about a month. 50 or 60 people go there a day.
- 1, New Street.—Opened a fortnight. Plenty of patronage.
- 1st floor, 2, East Street.—Opened 2 weeks. 60 or 70 a day. Fee at above places, 1 cent an injection.
- 2nd floor, 18, Taipingshan Street.—Opened 3 weeks. Fee, 2 cents.
- 2nd floor, 10, Kwaiwa Lane.—Opened in November. Number increased from 10 to 40 a day. Fee reduced from 2 to 1 cent.
- 367, Queen's Road Central.—Opened in March. Number of patients increased from 20 to 60.
- 98, Bonham Strand.—Opened 1½ months. 40 or 50 a day.
- 41, Stanley Street.—Branch of Kwaiwa Lane establishment. About 60.
- 179, Queen's Road East.—Opened 2 months.
- 104, Bonham Strand.
- 85, Bonham Strand.
- 65, Third Street.
- 91, Queen's Road West.
- 50, Praya West.

* Attached is a notice by a hospital, in Canton, recommending the adoption of the injection of Morphia.

The numbers given above cannot be relied on.

The ostensible reason for taking Morphine is to get rid of the craving for opium ; but even if a man doesn't want to do so he naturally prefers spending 3 or 4 cents on Morphia to 15 or 20 on opium.

The coolie class patronise these places. I should say that we won't be able to judge of the extent of this practice for another month or so. The writers put the number of people at between 1 and 2,000, who were no doubt all habitual opium smokers.

A. W. BREWIN.

5th June, 1893.

* Not printed.

(Report by the Police.)

CENTRAL POLICE STATION,
19th June, 1893.

CAPTAIN SUPERINTENDENT,

In accordance with instructions received from you and Mr. BUCKLE we have made inquiries regarding the use of Morphia injections.

The injections of Morphia are made with the object of curing persons of their opium-smoking habits and the method is said to have been instituted by one of Dr. KERR's students in Canton. It was commenced in Hongkong on a small scale last year, but it is only within the last two or three months that it has attained to its present extensive use. There are in the Colony, including Aberdeen,

Shaukiwan and Yaumati, about eighteen places in which about one thousand persons receive injections twice a day. There are a few, who no longer use it, who claim to have been completely cured of their opium-smoking habits by it; but others have tried it and afterwards gone back to opium-smoking.

A coolie who would smoke 5 or 6 cents' worth of opium a day only pays 1 cent for each injection, so that he saves 3 or 4 cents a day and obtains an equal effect, while at the same time he is getting cured of the opium smoking.

The Morphia used is purchased at the dispensaries as a powder at \$40 a lb., by one or two men, who dissolve it in water and sell the solution to the injectors. These inject the liquid under the skin, at the muscles of the arms, with small hypodermic syringes, which are also purchased at the dispensaries. The operator begins on a patient with a big dose, which he decreases daily, or once in two days, for about a month, when the cure should be effected.

Few of those making the injections are even Chinese medical practitioners and none of them have had training under foreigners. The unrestricted use of such a drug by reckless and unqualified practitioners must be a great danger to the community and, like the unrestricted sale, seems to call for the imposition of some restriction as a safeguard. Whether Morphia in the shape of a powder comes under the Ordinance as a preparation of opium may be a question for the law officers to decide, or if the Opium Farmer wishes, he could take up a case as a test case.

W. STANTON,

W. QUINCEY,

Inspectors.

(Minute by the Captain Superintendent of Police.)

Honourable COLONIAL TREASURER,

Report in accordance with your request.

F. H. M.

19.6.