

# RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 249

*Approved* April 24, 2000

WHEREAS, A survey of 347 New York City pharmacies found that half do not carry enough medicines for people in severe pain and the shortage is most acute in minority neighborhoods such as Harlem, and

WHEREAS, Dr. Sean Morrison of New York's Mount Sinai School of Medicine began the study after finding that many of his black and Hispanic patients were unable to fill narcotic-strength drugs for pain, and

WHEREAS, Morrison's team found that in neighborhoods where at least 80 percent of the population was white, 72 percent of the pharmacies, whether part of drug store chains or mom-and-pop operations, carried the drugs, and

WHEREAS, In areas where whites made up less than 40 percent of the population, only 25 percent of the stores had the medicines; and

WHEREAS, The discrepancy was seen even after the data were adjusted for the rates of burglary, robbery and drug-related arrests in the neighborhoods. Only 19 percent of the pharmacists with an inadequate supply of painkillers cited fear of robbery as the reason, and

WHEREAS, Most of the pharmacists we surveyed stated that they could order and obtain the requested medication for a patient within 72 hours, "Morrison and his colleagues write in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine. "For patients in severe pain, 72 hours is an unacceptably long period of time," and

WHEREAS, The finding "suggests that members of racial and ethnic minority groups are at substantial risk for the undertreatment of pain", they concluded, and

WHEREAS, In cases of severer pain, narcotic-strength drugs are often the only thing that can give comfort to a patient, when the pain is real, the drugs are seldom addicting, and

WHEREAS, Pharmacists told Morrison's team they did not stock the drugs because there was little demand for the drugs that are tightly regulated by federal and state agencies, and

WHEREAS, The researchers said the problem "calls for a program to educate pharmacists about the safe and appropriate use of opioid analgesics, as well as an evaluation of regulations that may act as disincentives for pharmacists to stock controlled substances", and

Sp. and Crustacean young

WHEREAS, Morrison told Reuters the group undertook the study shortly after Mount Sinai, located just south of Harlem, began a special program for helping people with serious illness cope with pain, and

WHEREAS, "I noticed that a substantial number of my patients, particularly African American and Latino patients, were unable to fill prescriptions for standard pain medications" when they left the hospital, and

WHEREAS, In an editorial in the Journal, Drs. Harold Freeman of North General Hospital and Richard Payne of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said the Morrison study is just the latest piece in "a growing body of compelling and disturbing evidence (that) points to inferior medical care for black Americans, even if they are on an equal economic footing with whites", and

WHEREAS, Blacks tend to have higher cancer rates and higher death rates from cancer. Studies have also shown that they are less likely to get surgery for lung, colon and breast cancer, hip replacement surgery, or to be signed up for an organ transplant if they have kidney failure, and

WHEREAS, Morrison's findings "lead us to believe that in addition to these burdens, blacks are also inadequately treated for pain from cancer," Freeman and Payne said, and

WHEREAS, "We believe the common thread in these findings is a subtle form of racial bias on the part of medical care providers," they said. "The level and extent of this problem are unknown, but it is real and potentially harmful, even though predominantly unintentional", and

WHEREAS, Physicians, as well as pharmacists, police officers and others, must learn to see people not through the lens of race but instead as the individual persons they are", the doctors said.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Rhode Island General Assembly is requested to promulgate rules and regulations prohibiting local pharmacies from not supplying enough narcotic-strength drugs for patients in severe pain that live in predominantly minority neighborhoods.

IN CITY COUNCIL

APR 18 2000

READ AND PASSED

PRES.

CLERK

APPROVED

APR 24 2000

MAYOR