

TRANSCRIPT

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Transcript: AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim, ABC Gold Coast, Drive with Bern Young, Monday 28 October 2024

Subjects: Pill testing at Schoolies

BERN YOUNG: First official day, business day for our brand new government, the LNP now in power in Queensland. One thing that's certainly clear is their stance on pill testing. Schoolies at the Gold Coast is only next month and for a while you've been told it could be the first Schoolies to have pill testing. But the LNP has promised to cancel it. I don't know if you were listening to *Breakfast with Nicole Dyer* when she posed this question to Surfers Paradise MP, John-Paul Langbroek. This was his answer:

[EXCERPT]

NICOLE DYER: The LNP wants to scrap pill testing for Schoolies, despite a plea from the AMA not to. Surfers Paradise is your patch. Do you remain adamant that there should be no pill testing at Schoolies?

JOHN-PAUL LANGBROEK: Yes, I do. I know this is a very complex issue. Schoolies is such a big [inaudible] I just believe it sends the message that doing some sort of drugs is okay. And I don't believe that doing drugs is okay at all.

BERN YOUNG: That's what John-Paul Langbroek had to say earlier this morning. I'll get to AMA Queensland in a moment. I just want to turn to Dave, who's called in from Currumbin this afternoon. Afternoon, Dave. What do you think about this potential cancellation of the pill testing?

CALLER DAVE: Well, the statement that the MP made was that he doesn't support this because he doesn't agree with giving a message of 'it's okay to use drugs'. But the bottom line is, the way I see it, is if someone's getting their pills tested, then they already have an intention to take the drug. So it's not like they're being introduced to a new opportunity. The message of okay or not okay is not the issue. The issue is if someone's having a pill tested, then they're probably more in line with modern thinking of harm reduction than they are with zero tolerance. Because these people still pumping the notion of zero tolerance are totally out of touch.

BERN YOUNG: So if someone's already decided that they believe it's okay, this is the user of that drug, you want them to have a safe chance with that drug? So you're supporting pill testing?

CALLER DAVE: Absolutely. Because if we look back in history, the number of young people that have lost their lives as a consequence of overdosing on substances that they've got no idea what the construct is – I think it's much safer if you know. No-one is giving a message of okayness. What they're giving a message of is the value of life and safety. And I think if the AMA has an opinion on it, their

opinion would be based on research, where the opinion of our friend that was on is really not based on research.

BERN YOUNG: Let's see what the evidence does say about it, Dave, because I've got the AMA on the line. Thanks for your call this afternoon. I'd be especially keen to hear from you if you're a parent of a potential Schoolie, someone who's right now buckling down for their exams, but looking forward to the celebrations when it's all over. Do you want to see pill testing at Gold Coast Schoolies? It would be for the first time, but it sounds like it won't be happening. Certainly John-Paul Langbroek and the new LNP government are opposed to it. Dr Nick Yim, AMA Queensland President, is on the line. So you're calling on the LNP to abandon their decision to repeal this idea. Why?

DR NICK YIM: At AMA Queensland, we're disappointed with the decision from the LNP to scrap pill testing. This proposal is part of drug diversion programs that have been in place for a year. We have consulted with doctors, police and legal experts. And I think this is something that will improve safety for our community, our young children and young adults, and especially at events such as Schoolies. When I was young, I lived on the Gold Coast, and there were a lot of tablets, a lot of unfortunate drugs around. If we can create an opportunity to do this more safely and also create an opportunity to have that conversation with that potential user, that is a great opportunity to have.

BERN YOUNG: Yeah, Dave just brought up - is there any evidence around this? What evidence is there about whether it works? And to John-Paul Langbroek's point, whether there's any evidence that it does encourage people to think that taking drugs is okay?

DR NICK YIM: These people have already purchased the medication, they've already got the tablets, so they have an intention to use. If someone is contemplating already to take an unknown substance, this is an opportunity for that individual to have that drug tested to see exactly what it is. These drugs are becoming more sophisticated with more synthetic drugs, and we are seeing, unfortunately, people entering our emergency departments with overdoses.

BERN YOUNG: Do you have any hope that you could convince this new government to keep the idea? Certainly, John-Paul Langbroek was very clear this morning. He doesn't want to see it. And the LNP have said they don't want it.

DR NICK YIM: At AMA Queensland, we will definitely try to get a meeting with the LNP government and have these conversations, because the key thing is there has been a lot of investment into the healthcare sector and we do commend the government for that. But this is an opportunity to actually provide education. It is one of the processes available. When someone does present to a pill testing centre, we have seen people give these young adults some education of the reasons not to have these drugs on board.

BERN YOUNG: Dr Nick Yim is my guest. He's President of AMA Queensland. We do have a pop-up pill testing clinic in Burleigh Heads that opened earlier this year. Do you think the LNP, the new government's stance, could affect that site as well?

DR NICK YIM: I genuinely hope it doesn't affect that site. I'm sure many of those residents around Burleigh and along the Gold Coast, some of them might have utilised that location. These simple life saving services like pill testing do keep our community safe.

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BERN YOUNG: Dr Nick Yim, AMA Queensland President, thanks for your time on ABC Gold Coast this afternoon.

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