

## Crime and punishment

**C**rime in our city is an unusual topic for a medical journal editorial. However, crime, particularly violent crime, against defenceless and innocent people seems to be becoming rampant, and I think this affects our mental health. You may say, then, now he is speaking about two things that he does not know anything about. One is crime and the other is mental health. This is probably true; however, it is concerning to me because I have a wife and children who must walk around this city and are in constant threat of being robbed, maimed, or killed.

There seems to be no limit to the cowardliness of the new wave of perpetrators. Recently two 16-year-old girls were beaten almost to death for pocket change. A woman at a SkyTrain station was savagely beaten by two men for her purse.

I listened to a member of the

Downtown Eastside Society discussing this problem and they reiterated what most of us feel: that these criminals have no fear. They are seldom arrested and if they are they get virtually no penalty. Their rights are deemed to be much more important than the rights of the rest of us, despite the heinousness of the crime.

I think we would all agree that we do not want to live in a police state, but the drug-fuelled arrogance with which the criminals completely ignore our laws should be addressed.

We need more police; we need laws and courts that can provide deterrent sentences when criminals are convicted. We need to deal with our homeless problem. There are many homeless individuals who have mental illnesses. But I also see many able-bodied young people who could be working, particularly in this booming economy, but choose not to. I am not say-

ing it is the homeless who are perpetrating the crimes, but I think our homelessness problem and our inability to deal with violent crime denotes a general lack of a will to control our society. I am concerned that we are sacrificing the livability of our city, and beginning to live in fear.

Other cities such as Portland and New York have dealt with the problem. Let us put more effort into dealing with our social issues and our housing problems, but also, in addition to telling our women and children to “give up your purse,” “never walk alone,” “never go out at night,” and to “always be on guard,” let us aggressively go after the low-lives and the cowards who are ruining our quality of life and have some decent penalties—penalties that either take criminals off the street or at least give them some pause before beating up a 16-year-old girl for \$8. —AJS

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