

Alberta organization questions Health Canada's authority

GLOBAL NEWS MARCH 22, 2011

CALGARY – A southern Alberta company that produces natural treatment for some mental illnesses is going back to court to question Health Canada's authority to remove natural health products from store shelves without providing proper evidence that they pose dangerous risks to users.

In 2003, Health Canada seized and destroyed shipments of the Truehope Nutritional Support Ltd's vitamin and mineral formula called EMPowerPlus. The formula is intended to help those suffering from mood disorders that have had little success with other medications.

The group says Health Canada's actions left thousands of Canadians in physical distress causing multiple hospitalizations and suicide deaths.

In 2004, Health Canada charged Truehope with the illegal sale of the formula; however, the court found Truehope innocent and ruled that the formula continue to be made available to Canadians.

During a 2006 trial in Alberta, the Canadian Mental Health Association's Alberta Director Ron Lajeunesse bore witness that because of Health Canada's actions in blocking access to the formula, innocent Canadians lost hope and committed suicide.

Current Health Canada regulations allow bureaucrats to remove natural health products at their discretion without explanation. Court proceedings beginning today will challenge that authority.

"I lost my wife to suicide when her bipolar illness was untreatable with medication. We have other options now, proven effective," says Truehope co-founder and mental health advocate Anthony Stephan.

"Any responsible regulatory body would assess the potential harm of making the product unavailable before they pulled it from the shelves."

Anthony Stephan's son Joseph was diagnosed as bi-polar when he was young. Despite taking other forms of medication, he says EMPower was the only thing that made him feel better.

"It's like a breath of fresh air. I have my life back, I have a family now. Because of it I have defied everything they ever told me, they said I would never be anything."

A bus full of approximately 70 Truehope supporters arrived in Calgary today from Raymond, Alberta for the court proceedings. Only 18 seats were available inside the court, so the majority had to wait in the lobby.

Global News spoke with a few of the attendees, who said without the supplement their quality of life would be vastly different.

"Now I look back and I see the difference it's made. Then it was just struggle all the time, struggle, struggle, whereas now I look back and I see the stability and the future that it's given me," says Kayleen Evanson.

Truehope's lawyer says the appeal is a one day event and it's unlikely the judge will make a ruling on the case today.