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INTERVENTION REPORT (EXCERPTS)

**Intervention at Centre intégré de santé
et de services sociaux de Chaudière-
Appalaches**

Québec City, November 2, 2021

THE INTERVENTION

The Québec Ombudsman received a report about the mobile nursing service (GIM) in the residential and long-term care centres (CHSLDs) of Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) de Chaudière-Appalaches.

Given the events reported, the Québec Ombudsman decided to intervene to ensure that nurses are available to care for the residents. The intervention concerns CISSS de Chaudière-Appalaches and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS).

The request for intervention pertains to the mobile nursing service within the CHSLDs of CISSS de Chaudière-Appalaches.

THE FINDINGS

During the investigation, the Québec Ombudsman noted the following:

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING THAT THERE ARE NURSES ON EVERY WORK SHIFT

CHSLDs house vulnerable people who have intense and complex care needs. MSSS requires that there be nurses in CHSLDs at all times so that quality care can be provided safely. During the Québec Ombudsman's investigation, both parties interviewed agreed on the importance of having nurses on all three shifts in CHSLDs.

OVERUSE OF A SO-CALLED "EXCEPTIONAL" MEASURE

The CISSS maintains that GIM is an exceptional measure. In the Québec Ombudsman's opinion, GIM should be used for no more than 10% of evening and night shifts. The statistics show that application of this measure is not exceptional in some of the CISSS's CHSLDs. Between July 20 and August 31, 2021, eight CHSLDs (nearly 30% of the institution's CHSLDs) used GIM for more than 10% of their evening and night shifts. More specifically, five CHSLDs used GIM for more than 20% of their work shifts. One of them even used this measure for 78% of their evening and night shifts. The Québec Ombudsman noted frequent deviations from the ministerial standard and considers this situation a cause for concern.

Alongside this, the Québec Ombudsman observed that there had been reports about the lack of nurses on certain work shifts in the CHSLDs for more than two years. In fact, in 2020, this situation was criticized by the Ordre des infirmiers et infirmières du Québec (OIIQ). In the Québec Ombudsman's opinion, this measure is not exceptional if it is frequent and it persists.

Because of its overuse by certain CHSLDs and its duration in time, GIM can scarcely be called an exceptional measure. The Québec Ombudsman considers that GIM could affect the quality and safety of the services provided to the vulnerable residents in the living environments concerned. A recommendation was therefore made (R-1).

MEASURES FOR ENSURING THE SAFE PROVISION OF QUALITY SERVICES TO RESIDENTS

GIM provides for requirements for exceptions based on residents' clinical condition. However, in a letter to the CISSS's director of nursing, MSSS stated that it felt that the requirements must be defined to take into account the instability of the client population and certain kinds of care that call for clinical assessments.

In a letter to the Québec Ombudsman, the CISSS indicated that in order to prevent any ambiguity about exceptional measures given that GIM does not apply to residents who have instabilities, it had not changed the GIM document. The CISSS specifies that in cases where there is doubt, the clinical-administrative coordinator must validate instability.

However, the CISSS's GIM document does not say anything about conferring with the coordinator if doubt persists about a resident's stability. The lack of clarity in communications is among the factors that could lead to a serious incident.

The events related to COVID-19 within the past year have reinforced these vulnerable residents' need for timely provision of the required clinical assessment, supervision and follow-up. A recommendation was therefore made (R2).

The Québec Ombudsman noted that the CISSS showed it was willing to assess service quality and safety and committed to gauge the clinical suitability of GIM interventions. However, as the Institut national d'excellence en santé et service sociaux (INESSS) pointed out, lack of time or nursing care hinders the possibility of respecting residents' choices and constitutes a major obstacle to quality care. As a result, the Québec Ombudsman remains concerned about the quality and safety of GIM care provided to CHSLD residents. A recommendation was therefore made (R3).

PROBLEMS ATTRACTING AND RETAINING STAFF

According to INESSS (2020), staff shortages weigh down and intensify the workload of staff on site. The Québec Ombudsman fears that this exacerbates departures and the shortage of personnel in CHSLDs.

The CISSS is responsible for doing what is needed to ensure nursing staff stability. The CISSS must continue its efforts to hire and retain nurses so that residents can have quality care and services. Its investigation concluded, the Québec Ombudsman encourages the CISSS to continue the interventions underway to rectify short-staffing and would like to be informed about implementation of the action plan for that purpose. A recommendation has therefore been made (R-4).

MSSS'S ACTION REGARDING SHORT-STAFFING

The information collected by the Québec Ombudsman indicates that other health and social services network institutions use GIM in CHSLDs. The Québec Ombudsman noted that MSSS is aware of the problem of understaffing in certain facilities and is helping them seek solutions. However, it is important that MSSS continue to monitor the facilities that do not obey the ministerial directive about a nurse on every work shift. A recommendation has therefore been made (R-5).

The events that occurred in CHSLDs during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the need for a sufficient number of nurses for every work shift. The Québec Ombudsman has long criticized the harm to CHSLD residents due to staff shortages. It is counting on MSSS to intervene to ensure that network institutions have the support, resources and guidance needed to correct the situation. A recommendation was therefore made (R-6).

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a view to improving service and care quality, the Québec Ombudsman recommends that Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de Chaudière-Appalaches:

- R-1** Obey the ministerial directive to ensure the presence of a nurse on every work shift;
By December 1, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman written confirmation that this directive has been obeyed.
- R-2** Increase the exclusion requirements in the mobile nursing service model so as to ensure the residents' health and safety under all circumstances;
By December 1, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman a copy of the new exclusion requirements.
- R-3** Assess the effects of the mobile nursing service on the quality and safety of the care and services provided to CHSLD residents;
By December 1, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman a copy of the assessment carried out.
- R-4** Foster the attraction and retention of nurses in CHSLDs;
By December 31, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman a detailed description of the means deployed and planned.

To ensure that network institutions have the support, resources and guidance required for improving the situation, the Québec Ombudsman recommends that the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux:

R-5 Produce a status report on the institutions that do not obey the ministerial directive to ensure the presence of a nurse on every work shift in CHSLDs;

By December 1, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman a copy of the status report.

R-6 Issue guidelines for ensuring the safety of CHSLD residents during major shortages of nurses.

By December 31, 2021, send the Québec Ombudsman a copy of the guidelines transmitted to network institutions.

Expected follow-up

In accordance with the provisions of the *Act respecting the Health and Social Services Ombudsman* (CQLR, c. P-31.1) within 30 days of receiving this report, the institution must inform the Québec Ombudsman of whether it intends to implement the recommendations made to it, or of its reasons if it has decided not to act on them.



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Québec City Office

800, place D'Youville, 19^e étage
Québec (Québec) G1R 3P4
Phone: 418 643-2688

Montréal Office

1080, côte du Beaver Hall
10^e étage, bureau 1000
Montréal (Québec) H2Z 1S8
Phone: 514 873-2032

protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca

Toll-free: 1 800 463-5070
Fax: 1 866 902-7130
protecteur@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca