

IMPORTANT MESSAGE JUNE 15, 2022

We received a letter from the Department of Health and Social Services, signed by Minister Carmant and Minister Dubé.

Both have indicated their intention to refuse the in vitro fertilization (IVF) permit at the Procrea Gatineau clinic.

Both had signed the first letter in March 2022 giving us 20 days to justify the need for a clinic in the area. Both have now signed this second letter of June 2022 and indicated their intention to refuse access to care for more than 400,000 people in the Outaouais, in addition to the population of Abitibi-Témiscamingue which is also served by our clinic, the ONLY fertility clinic in the west of Québec. So, half a million people are told they are not important. That they are not a priority for their government, which also prides itself on being an ally of the regions.

Here are the arguments of Minister Carmant and Minister Dubé.

1. The government prioritizes Quebec and Montréal

- This letter surprises me. The government of François Legault keeps repeating that "*A strong Quebec requires strong regions*". What I see is that access to fertility care for the Outaouais and Abitibi region is not important for the government.
- People who live in Gatineau will therefore have to go to Montreal, whereas a clinic could offer all the care locally, under simple permission from the government. The situation will be the same, if not worse, for all people in the Outaouais and Abitibi.
- Nevertheless
 - Gatineau and its surroundings represent the fourth largest city in Quebec. As mentioned, the Abitibi-Témiscamingue clinic also serves, which represents a total of 500,000 people.
 - If we compare a little and look at the number of fertility specialists per population, we see this:
 - Province of Quebec = 8.5 M with more than 30 doctors
 - So, 1 doctor per 283,000 inhabitants
 - City of Montreal = 1.8 M with more than 20 doctors
 - So, 1 doctor per 90,000 inhabitants
 - Quebec City = 520 K with 4 doctors
 - So, 1 doctor per 130,000 inhabitants
 - City of Laval = 437 K with 3 doctors
 - So, 1 doctor per 145,000 inhabitants
- Conclusion: the government intends to refuse the permit for Gatineau when there is only one doctor for more than 400,000 people. In addition, on January 20, 2022, the government proudly announced that it was granting a new permit to another clinic in Montréal. This means an additional clinic for a city that already had five. Less than 400,000 people (in terms of population) will benefit from this clinic. Whatever the government's calculations, they do not hold water.

2. Outside of Quebec City and Montreal, the ministry prioritizes Level 2+ Assisted Reproduction Centers in partnership with Level 3 CPAs. CISSSO plans to develop the MAR in the region.

- I am incredibly pleased to hear that CISSSO wants to develop a program in the region. However, when will this happen? How long will the people of Gatineau have to wait?
- The government mentions the establishment of partnerships with Level 3 centres. However, if the government gives us the permit, this centre will be in Montreal.
- Considering that I am the only fertility specialist in the area and that I already run a fertility center that has been very successful so far, wouldn't it have made sense to approach me? At the very least, have a constructive discussion? Instead, the government intends to limit my ability to care for the population.
- In addition, according to medical staffing plans updated in June 2022, there are two vacancies in obstetrics and gynecology in the region. There is therefore a shortage of staff at the level of gynecologists and those present would be asked to take on additional tasks. Are we not worried about the other care that will be neglected by these same gynecologists already overloaded?
- The Gatineau clinic is currently experiencing a waiting period for a first visit of 18 months. In comparison, waiting lists in Montreal are around 6 months.
- The Gatineau clinic is an asset to the public system. The services offered help relieve the burden of care on hospitals.

3. The projected volume of 150 IVF cycles is insufficient to maintain expertise

- No matter the size of a clinic, each doctor does about 100 to 200 IVF cycles per year. The larger the clinic, the more doctors there are. But they do not usually perform more cycles each. Often, in large structures, they tend to do a little less, because they also provide other practices (gynecology for example).
- The Gatineau clinic has only one doctor: me. I do fertility full time. I will exceed the number of cycles done by each doctor in Quebec. We have the population to have about 500 cycles a year. It is therefore wrong to say that my flow will be lower than that of another fertility doctor in Quebec.
- To increase output, doctors must be recruited. This will be impossible without the construction of an IVF laboratory.

4. What now?

- The government is once again giving us 20 days to respond to this letter. Our previous experience, however, tells us that it will potentially take several months before we get an answer. The clinic is not in a position to absorb such delays.
- Although I believe a refusal by the government would be catastrophic for the region, for infertile couples and for health care in general in our region, I must resign myself to accepting that we are unlikely to obtain this permit in the near future.

- I invite all those who would be affected by a government refusal to raise their concerns with the government, including Minister Carmant.

Write to the government, make your voice heard.

Ministère de la Santé et des Services
sociaux Édifice Catherine-De Longpré
1075, chemin Sainte-Foy, 15th
floor Quebec (Quebec) G1S 2M1
Phone: 418 266-7181
Fax: 418 266-7197
ministre.delegue@msss.gouv.qc.ca

Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
2021, union avenue, Suite 10.051
Montréal (Québec)
H3A 2S9
Telephone: 514 873-3700
Fax: 514 873-7488
ministre.delegue@msss.gouv.qc.ca

The conclusion is clear: the only way to stay open and continue to offer fertility care in the region is to leave the RAMQ. It has always been a last resort, but the government does not leave me with any other option.

We will continue to fight to have this permit and to be able to ensure access to IVF services for people in the Outaouais and Abitibi-Témiscamingue. However, I wish to express my disappointment and sadness for what follows. I must become a non-ramq participant. As of July 15, all the care offered by the Gatineau clinic will be subject to a fee and it will not be possible to obtain reimbursement from the RAMQ. Patients will still retain access to tax credits.

Eric Himaya