

Denise Dunn

From: Susan Bonnell
Sent: Wednesday, June 13, 2007 9:00 AM
To: Oscar Howell; George Tilley; Stephen Dodge
Subject: FW: Inadequate response to lab warning, pathologist says - CBC - June 13 2007

I'm really worried. I think we should discuss the implications and strategize about how we can cut off the angle I'm afraid these guys are going to take.



Eastern
Health

Susan Bonnell

Director, Strategic Communications
709-777-1426 (1338)

From: Susan Bonnell
Sent: Wednesday, June 13, 2007 8:58 AM
To: Executive Team Eastern Health May 2005; Heather Predham; Terry Gulliver; Nebojsa Denic; Kara Laing
Subject: FW: Inadequate response to lab warning, pathologist says - CBC - June 13 2007

This issue is in the news again.

I listened to Vic Adopia this morning with Jeff Gillhooly. It's interesting that this is the first time to my recollection that I have heard a reporter admit that this review process hasn't been undertaken anywhere else in the country. That point has really been missed by the media, despite our attempt to bring it to the forefront.

You know what worries me more than anything about this whole process is the implications for how the health care system operates - quality improvement, etc. There seems to be an impression certainly at CBC anyway that our system if not perfect is therefore flawed. You can be sure that they are digging now to see what other lab processes we have had what they will call "problems" with in the past.



Eastern
Health

Susan Bonnell

Director, Strategic Communications
709-777-1426 (1338)

From: Elizabeth Strange
Sent: Wednesday, June 13, 2007 8:53 AM
To: Susan Bonnell

6/13/2007

Subject: Inadequate response to lab warning, pathologist says - CBC - June 13 2007

Inadequate response to lab warning, pathologist says

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CBC News

A pathologist who warned health authorities in St. John's about flawed cancer tests four years ago said he could not trust laboratory results, told CBC News this week that he was not satisfied with how officials immediately responded.

Gershon Ejeckam wrote an internal memo in 2003 about a list of problems at the lab, including lack of training, high turnover and inappropriate working spaces.

The memo, which CBC News reported on two weeks ago, showed authorities were aware of serious problems at the lab now managed by the Eastern Health regional authority.

The memo flagged issues two years before Eastern Health disclosed it was having serious problems with hormone receptor tests, which help determine which course of treatment is appropriate for breast cancer patients.

A judicial inquiry is pending on those tests, in which more than 300 breast cancer patients were given wrong results. A class action lawsuit has also been certified by Newfoundland Supreme Court.

Speaking publicly on the issue for the first time, Ejeckam, who now lives in Nigeria, said in an interview that a shortage of pathologists was one of the reasons he wrote his memo.

"Situations where today the results were very good, tomorrow it's a bad result or no result at all, so there is no question that there was no consistency in the testing at that time," Ejeckam told CBC News.

Despite saying he could not trust the Health Sciences Centre lab's results, and that the authority could be legally liable for errors, Ejeckam said he was not pleased with what happened next.

"Well, there was no immediate response," he said.

"There was no question about it. The chairman, the program director ... there was no response to it."

In the spring of 2003, Ejeckam suspended hormone receptor tests for several weeks, to address a number of problems.

A month later, Ejeckam wrote that he was satisfied that the problems with those tests had been solved, although he cautioned that quality control at the lab was still "unsatisfactory."

Earlier this month, Eastern Health released other memos suggesting that problems at the lab were

addressed.

In 2005, Eastern Health suspended hormone receptor testing at the lab again and began retesting results dating back to 1997.

Late last year, Eastern Health disclosed that those tests had had an error rate ranging between 10 per cent and 15 per cent. However, documents registered with Newfoundland Supreme Court showed the error rate was several times higher.

Those disclosures sparked a furor, and the Newfoundland and Labrador government last month announced it would hold a judicial inquiry into the flawed tests. The inquiry has yet to be appointed.

Ejeckam left the Health Sciences Centre in St. John's in 2006, and is now practising in Nigeria.

Liz ☺



Eastern
Health

Elizabeth Strange
Strategic Communications
Administrative Office
Waterford Bridge Road
St. John's, NL A1E 4J8
Tel: 709-777-1338
Fax: 709-777-1344
Email: Elizabeth.Strange@easternhealth.ca
www.easternhealth.ca