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A PHYSICIAN'S REFUSAL TO UNDERGO REFRESHER TRAINING IS SUFFICIENT GROUNDS FOR A HEALTH INSTITUTION TO DENY THE RENEWAL OF STATUS AND PRIVILEGES

CHARLES OLIVIER THIBEAULT

ON AUGUST 18, 2015, THE TRIBUNAL ADMINISTRATIF DU QUÉBEC (TAQ) CONFIRMED THE DECISION OF A HEALTH INSTITUTION TO NOT RENEW THE STATUS AND PRIVILEGES OF ONE OF ITS PHYSICIANS AFTER HE REFUSED TO UNDERGO REFRESHER TRAINING TO ACQUIRE SKILLS THAT WERE NECESSARY TO PERFORM HIS NEW DUTIES.¹

The physician in question, a hematology specialist, had been hired as a researcher several years ago. At the time, he had been unable to obtain privileges in the hematology service but privileges had been granted to him in the medical genetics service.

The physician exclusively devoted his practice to his research work for many years. Although he had privileges in the medical genetics service, he did not participate in clinical practice in any way. This situation, although imperfect, was nonetheless tolerated by the institution, which considered that the physician had to have status and privileges in good standing within the institution in order to pursue his research work there.

Gradually, the physician found himself unable to renew the financing related to his research work, up until the time when his work ceased completely. He therefore decided to reorient his career toward clinical practice. Considering that he had privileges in the medical genetics service, the chief offered for him to join the medical genetics clinic to perform clinical follow-up of patients at risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer.

Since the physician lacked supporting, relevant clinical experience, the chief asked him to undergo refresher training relating to the breast and gynecological examinations that were required as part of the follow-up of these patients. His integration into the medical genetics clinic was conditional upon successfully completing the training.

The physician refused to undergo the refresher training. The chief had the head of department and the director of professional services intervene. Despite discussions and negotiations spanning over several months, the physician persisted in refusing to undergo refresher training.

Given the stalemate and the fact that the physician no longer conducted any activities at the institution, the head of department took steps internally in order for the physician's status and privileges to not be renewed.

¹ 2015 QCTAQ 08321.

In its decision, the TAQ lists several elements that are essential to a good understanding of the inner workings of health institutions and the process for renewing the status and privileges of physicians, including:

- ▶ that an institution, as part of managing a medical service, may require a physician to undergo refresher training to acquire skills necessary to his or her practice;
- ▶ the fact that the professional privileges of a physician do not constitute acquired rights;
- ▶ that the process for the renewal of the status and privileges of a physician pursuant to section 238 of the ARHSS² is an administrative issue that must be distinguished from the disciplinary process under section 249 of the same statute.

With respect to the review that the TAQ must conduct in the case of a contested non-renewal, the TAQ adds, in particular, that:

- ▶ it must assess whether the situation of a physician justified the board of directors to not renew his or her privileges, taking into account the specific requirements of the institution;
- ▶ it sits *de novo* and therefore is not limited by the facts originally presented in the decision of the board of directors of the establishment.

With respect to the *de novo* trial which the TAQ must conduct, in this case, the TAQ authorized the RAMQ to file the physician's billing for the preceding years, despite the physician's opposition. This request, made by counsel for the institution, aimed to conclusively demonstrate to the TAQ that the physician did not possess the necessary experience to follow the patients of the medical genetics clinic. The analysis of this new evidence by the TAQ left little doubt as to whether the refresher training was necessary in the circumstances. The non-renewal of the status and privileges of the physician was therefore confirmed by the TAQ. This decision will be final unless contested by the physician through judicial review proceedings, which have not yet been undertaken.

² *An Act Respecting Health Services and Social Services*, CQLR, c. 5-4.2.

CHARLES OLIVIER THIBEAULT

514 877-3086

cothibeault@lavery.ca

HEALTH LAW TEAM UNDER THE DIRECTION OF SYLVAIN POIRIER

PIERRE-L. BARIBEAU	514 877-2965	pbaribeau@lavery.ca
PIERRE BEAUDOIN	418 266-3068	pbeaudoin@lavery.ca
ANNE BÉLANGER	514 877-3091	abelanger@lavery.ca
JÉRÔME BÉLANGER	514 877-3012	jebelanger@lavery.ca
CLAUDIA BÉRUBÉ	819 346-3661	cberube@lavery.ca
DAVE BOUCHARD	819 346-3411	dabouchard@lavery.ca
JULES BRIÈRE	418 266-3093	jbriere@lavery.ca
GENEVIÈVE CHAMBERLAND	819 346-2562	gchamberland@lavery.ca
MAGALI COURNOYER-PROULX	514 877-2930	mproulx@lavery.ca
MARIKA COUTURE-HOULE	819 346-0340	mcouturehoule@lavery.ca
RAYMOND DORAY, AD. E.	514 877-2913	rdoray@lavery.ca
SIMON GAGNÉ	514 877-2916	sgagne@lavery.ca
DANIELLE GAUTHIER	819 346-8073	dgauthier@lavery.ca
HÉLÈNE GAUVIN	418 266-3053	hgauvin@lavery.ca
CHERYL GILBERT	819 346-2207	cgilbert@lavery.ca
RHONDA GRINTUCH	514 877-3068	rgrintuch@lavery.ca
MARIE-JOSÉE HÉTU	819 373-4274	mjhetu@lavery.ca
VÉRONIQUE IEZZONI	514 877-3003	viezzoni@lavery.ca
MARIE-HÉLÈNE JOLICOEUR	514 877-2955	mhjolicoeur@lavery.ca
MAUDE LAFORTUNE-BÉLAIR	514 877-3077	mlafortunebelair@lavery.ca
ARIANE LAUZIÈRE	819 373-1881	alauziere@lavery.ca
MYRIAM LAVALLÉE	819 373-0339	mlavallee@lavery.ca
JOHN N. MCFARLANE	613 233-2674	jmcfarlane@lavery.ca
ZÉÏNEB MELLOULI	514 877-3056	zmellouli@lavery.ca
PATRICK A. MOLINARI, MSRC	514 877-3079	pmolinari@lavery.ca
VÉRONIQUE MORIN, CRIA	514 877-3082	vmorin@lavery.ca
JEAN-FRANÇOIS PAGÉ	819 346-7999	jfpag@lavery.ca
CATHERINE PARISEAULT	514 878-5448	cpariseault@lavery.ca
SYLVAIN POIRIER	514 877-2942	spoirier@lavery.ca
LOUIS ROCHETTE	418 266-3077	lrochette@lavery.ca
VIRGINIE SIMARD	514 877-2931	vsimard@lavery.ca
LOUIS THIBAUT-GERMAIN	418 266-3067	lthibaultgermain@lavery.ca
CHARLES OLIVIER THIBEAULT	514 877-3086	cothibeault@lavery.ca

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CONTACTS

- MONTREAL** ▶ 1 Place Ville Marie 514 871-1522
- QUEBEC CITY** ▶ 925 Grande Allée West 418 688-5000
- SHERBROOKE** ▶ Cité du Parc, 95 Jacques-Cartier Blvd. South 819 346-5058
- TROIS-RIVIÈRES** ▶ 1500 Royale Street 819 373-7000
- OTTAWA** ▶ 360 Albert Street 613 594-4936

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