



Quebec faces shortage of anesthetists

Anesthetists are in short supply in Quebec, and the shortage is already causing serious problems in Montreal and several small cities. Dr. O'Donnell Bedard, president of the Association of Anesthetists of Quebec, says the equivalent of about 450 full-time anesthetists are available in the province, while about 525 are needed.

Communities such as St.-Georges-de-Beauce, Sherbrooke, Sorel and Drummondville are already experiencing major problems. "There are 3 or 4 hospitals that have 1 anesthetist, or none at all," he says. Although the problem is not new, the shortage worsened recently because many anesthetists reached age 65 and retired, and others hastened their decisions to retire because the province offered buy-out packages. A few left for other parts of Canada or the US.

Bedard predicts that the province should be producing more newly trained anesthetists than it loses within a few years. In the meantime, the association has been able to meet needs in small centres with a system of rotating replacements, including some help from retirees. However,

says Bedard, there are so many rules and requirements in Montreal and in teaching hospitals that the association has not been able to help out in those areas.

Although both French and English hospitals are affected, the Montreal General and the Montreal Children's hospitals have been hit hardest. At the General, says chief of surgery Dr. David Mulder, 11 or 12 operating rooms are normally in use. "Today we have 8," he says, "and in the summer we may be down to 6." He is worried that the situation threatens the hospital's role as a level-one trauma centre. As well, waiting lists for surgery are longer and surgeons are finding it more difficult to make a living. As a result, several are considering leaving the city.

Dr. Francesco Carli, chair of anesthesia at McGill University, says the university is having trouble recruiting people because many anesthetists don't want to go into academic medicine. Another problem is that young doctors who want to work in Montreal can only bill 70% of normal fee rates for 4 years. The government introduced that policy to encourage physicians to practise in smaller communities.

Efforts to recruit anesthetists to McGill from other parts of Canada, the US or abroad have not been very successful, says Carli, because some physicians are worried that they would not be welcome in a French environment. — © *Janice Hamilton*

Cooler heads prevail

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One of the most distressing side effects of cancer treatment is hair loss due to chemotherapy. Since hair loss can be reduced if patients' scalps are kept cool — this reduces blood flow to hair follicles and cuts the concentration of cytotoxic chemicals — British researchers have developed the Paxman Scalp Cooler, which uses circulating glycol to cool the scalp and keep it at a constant temperature. The company that developed it, Paxman Coolers Ltd., says hair loss can be a serious issue because some patients refuse to accept treatment because of it.