

21 surgery patients in Windsor fear exposure to tainted tissue

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PREMA OZA

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WINDSOR—A tainted-tissue scandal involving the sale of unscreened body parts to health-care facilities in Canada and the United States has made its way to Windsor, affecting 21 surgery patients at a major city hospital.

Officials at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital notified the patients of the potential risks and exposure from the unscreened products, obtained by a U.S. tissue bank known as Biomedical Tissue Services Limited, based in New Jersey. The surgeries were performed between spring 2003 and late 2005.

Hospital chief of staff Dr. Art Kidd said the concerns stem from a Health Canada notification last October about tissue products not being adequately screened for such diseases as HIV 1 and 2, hepatitis B and C, syphilis and human T-cell lymphotropic virus, or HTLV I and II.

"As I understand it, it was a single supplier from the United States that notified Health Canada," he said. "That particular supplier was actually a processor of the tissues and so what they discovered was one of their procuring suppliers had not been following the procedures ... the acceptable procedures with regard to screening potential donors."

Kidd said he personally called each affected patient, and Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital has offered health screening tests and follow-up aid to some family physicians of those involved.

He would not provide any detailed patient histories, except to say that most of the procedures where the tissue or bone material was used were in back or hip surgeries.

The media have focused on a Windsor woman who appeared on CBC's *The National* with her lawyer expressing concerns for her health after being contacted by hospital officials.

Windsor lawyer Greg Monforton is assisting her, and his office has fielded numerous calls for information.

He said his client is concerned about her health and that of her family, and she was scheduled to undergo blood testing yesterday to determine if she has cause for alarm stemming from spinal fusion surgery in late 2004.

"She is fearful and worried," he said.

Monforton said a letter from the hospital attempted to console patients about any potential health risks, but it also stated that "the actual infectious risk is unknown."

"Currently, we have a lot of questions," he said, adding he doesn't know why the hospital waited three months to notify patients after Health Canada advised of a voluntary recall in the U.S.

"Did that delay prejudice the health of any of the individuals?"

Health Canada spokeswoman Nathalie Lalonde said 67 physicians or hospitals in eight provinces were affected.

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