

Answers about Aylmer's health situation

Lisa Courtnage

With West Quebec experiencing the second-highest shortage of family doctors province-wide, second only to the Mauricie region, many new residents find themselves with more questions than answers when looking for health-care services.

A letter to the editor, received by *The Bulletin* from a recent immigrant to Canada, highlighted many of these questions. Emigrating to Aylmer three years ago from the former Yugoslavia, Nada Medjovic and her two children have been unable to find a family doctor, and with limited knowledge of English and French, she has met equal difficulties in finding answers.

To address these questions for Ms Medjovic and the many other coming from outside the province and the country who contribute to the growing population of Aylmer and West Quebec, *The Bulletin* contacted officials and experts from regional health services and organizations for the following explanations.

1. HOW MANY WALK-IN CLINICS ARE IN AYLMER, IF ANY?

ANSWER: The only walk-in clinic, since the fire at the Plaza Glenwood, is the Health Co-op Santé Aylmer located on du Couvent Street. The Co-op, which is on holidays and not accepting patients until August 14, operates on a first-come/first-served basis for walk-in patients until all available emergency appointments are booked. According to the clinic, the appointments go fast and it is best to arrive at the clinic when it opens at 8 am.

2. WHAT IS THE CLSC? FOR WHO? WHERE?

ANSWER: The CLSC is the local community health and social services centre, and is located on Leguerrier Street in Aylmer. The CLSC is under provincial supervision, and offers a range of services as well as its medical services. The phone number is 684-2251. Service is bilingual.

3. WHAT IS THE CO-OP CLINIC AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

ANSWER: Information about the Co-op, membership and services is available in English and French on the internet at www.coopsa.org.

4. ARE THERE WAITING LISTS FOR FAMILY DOCTORS? IF YES, WHERE AND HOW LONG IS THE WAITING TIME?

ANSWER: There is no regional waiting list, according to the Outaouais Health Agency. Residents in need of medical care should call the Info-Santé line, by calling the CLSC at 684-2251 (after hours, all calls go directly to the Info-Santé), and explain what is needed. There may be doctors available for serious medical problems, said Agency spokesperson Martin St-Louis, but this isn't a solution for persons looking for a family doctor, since priority is given to those with serious medical conditions.

"The situation is not new and the solution is not simple," he noted. "It will take time to reduce the shortage of family doctors." After a reduction in the number of students admitted to medical school in 1996, admissions were only increased in 2000-01, he added. The Co-op Santé does have a waiting list for its members, according to Antoine Normand, a board member in charge of communications for the co-op. Efforts are underway to recruit new doctors, he told *The Bulletin*.

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Walk-in clinic, CLSC, family doctor, X-rays, ultrasounds, waiting, Ottawa, Ontario

5. LET'S IMAGINE THAT FIVE PEOPLE FROM AYLMER ARE SICK TODAY – WHERE DO THEY GO TO ASK FOR HELP?

ANSWER: Patients requiring immediate treatment should go directly to the emergency room of the hospital in Hull, suggested Mr St-Louis. Less urgent concerns can be handled by walk-in clinics, a list of which can be obtained by calling the Info-Santé.

6. WHERE DO AYLMER RESIDENTS GO FOR X-RAYS OR ULTRASOUNDS, AND WHAT IS THE AVERAGE WAITING TIME?

These services are only provided upon referral by a doctor, said Mr St-Louis, and the waiting time depends on the urgency of the medical condition. "It's an individual decision to go to Ottawa for services. If the service is available in Gatineau, regardless of the waiting time, Quebec will not pay for the service in Ontario." However, the shortage of obstetric services in West Quebec means that residents can be reimbursed if they obtain these services across the river in Ontario. The waiting time is not the same for all services. For example, West Quebec residents needing an MRI scan have a shorter waiting time than those in Ontario. Because of this, he noted, new, private MRI clinics have opened in Hull to serve patients from Ottawa (because Ontario doesn't allow private clinics)