Ethics as a Tool for Deliberation and for the Development of Healthy Public Policies: The Case of Unsanitary Housing in Montreal

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Agenda

- Guidelines for reporting and intervening
- Background
- Reporting
- Initial management
- Medical/environmental survey
- Survey results and recommendations
- Follow-up



Intervention guidelines

- Primacy of health protection
- Scientific rigour
- Equity
- Proportionality
- Precaution
- Empowerment
- Transparency
- Openness



From Drapeau S., Cadre de référence en gestion des risques pour la santé dans le réseau québécois de la santé publique. Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2003, 85 pages.





Background

Sanitary problems in Montreal housing

- > Mould
- > Mites
- Cockroaches
- Mice (sometimes rats)
- Growing problem of bedbugs in Montreal
- > Etc.

Health effects

- Respiratory health problems (allergies, irritants and infectious agents)
- Dermatological problems
- Mental health? (e.g. symptoms of anxiety and depression)
- Sleep quality?
- Social isolation?
- > Harmful, toxic products used by exterminators?
- Impact on general health
- > Etc.
- Ethical principle: Primacy of health protection, scientific rigour, precaution
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- Call received from a school
- Bedbugs found on a student
 - School's administrators notify the father, who denies that there is a problem
 - Call made to the father
 - Says that there is indeed a problem, but is too afraid of the repercussions if he lodges a complaint with the city
- > Ethical principle: Empowerment







- By-law concerning the sanitation and the maintenance of housing units
 - > Standards in effect
 - Tenant must send a registered letter to the owner explaining the problem and demanding that action be taken within 10 days.
 - If nothing is done, the tenant can call the city inspector.
 - Notice of an infraction
 - Report of an infraction





- Father's fear of the owner
- According to the father, the problem is widespread.
- Fear of school authorities with respect to the infestation
- Joint decision made by the CSSS and the DSP to lodge a complaint about the building with the borough in the name of the tenant
- Guiding ethical principles: primacy of health protection, empowerment, confidentiality





- The municipal inspector issues a notice of infraction concerning the owner's building.
- Precautionary measures taken by the school to avoid dispersal of bedbugs.
- Dwelling is treated, the father reports that the problem has been solved.
- Ethical principle: openness





- Several weeks later a call is received from the school.
 - The student has again brought bedbugs into the school.
 - To protect its employees, the school decides to expel the child.
- > Ethical principle: proportionality





- In early April, Dr. Perron visited the home of the expelled child
- Dr. Perron's observations:
 - The exterminator sold insecticides for the tenant to apply himself.
 - The dwelling is in a run-down state due to poor maintenance by the owner (mould in several areas, mouldy debris on the floor).
 - > A fragment of paint was seen on the floor.
 - Several members of the family repeatedly showed symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections.
 - > The children presented with pica.
 - No bedbugs were visible, ruling out a severe infestation but not excluding their presence.
- Recommendation made that the school take the student back.
- Ethical principles: Primacy of health protection, precaution

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Medical/environmental survey Following the finding on the run-down state

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- Meeting organized with the CSSS, the DSP, community care givers and the borough to develop an action strategy (mid-April)
- Two key components: sanitation issues and medical questionnaire
- Ethical principles: primacy of health protection, openness, precaution

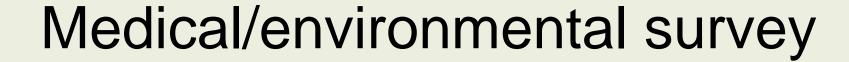


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Medical/environmental survey DSP-CSSS

- Survey objectives
 - > To detect health problems caused by housing conditions
 - To ensure appropriate management by providing the required service corridors
 - Psychosocial CSSS
 - Medical DSP
 - > To make recommendations to the City based on our findings
 - Taking over building management
 - Eradication of vermin
 - Relocation notice for the family in poor health or with rapidly deteriorating health due to the dwelling
 - Sealed for excessive contamination following the relocation
 - To collaborate with the tenant rights organization for legal assistance
 - To ensure that management of the building will be taken over so that the unsafe conditions are brought to an end
 - > Ethical principles: primacy of health protection, empowerment, precaution, equity, proportionality



- Medical/environmental survey (end of May, beginning of June)
 - > CSSS DSP
 - Hygienist DSP
 - CSSS nurses, DSP physician
 - > Social care givers from the CSSS
 - Community groups with mandates from the CSSS to organize meetings with tenants and for translation services







- Use of a partly validated questionnaire on:
 - General health
 - > Antecedents
 - Respiratory, dermatological and mental health
 - > The environment and quality of life
 - > Presence of mould and vermin
- Ethical principle: scientific rigour





Survey results and recommendations

- Environmental health
 - The buildings and a sufficient number of dwellings were visited to establish a profile
 - Significant building envelope problems were found, with water infiltration in many places
 - Significant, active water damage in many dwellings
 - Widespread presence of mould
- Recommendations made to the City's inspection department to follow up with the owner and ensure that sanitary living conditions are provided in the buildings
- Ethical principles: health protection, transparency and precaution



Survey results and recommendations

- Health
 - Observations
 - Approximately 50% of tenants were reached
 - Dwelling-related health problems in over half of the units
 - Particularly related to respiratory, dermatological and mental health
 - Potentially dangerous and ineffective management of the bedbug problem (the extermination company sold extermination products to the tenant)
 - Notable presence of mice and cockroaches in the building
 - Paint chips falling off walls in the dwelling and presence of mouldy debris.

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Survey results and recommendations

- Many dwellings with related health problems or threats that are serious enough to recommend relocation.
- Some tenants accepted immediately; others accepted in the weeks that followed.
- Recommendations made to the inspection service to relocate tenants, coordinating with the CSSS and City's housing agency.
- Corridors of service established for some patients.
- Recommendations made to the City on how to deal with the cockroach, bedbug and mice infestations.
- Ethical principles: empowerment balanced with health protection and precaution, among other principles





Follow-up

- Follow-up strategy currently being developed with the CSSS.
- Ethical principle: primacy of health protection



Thoughts on public policies and housing

- Macro strategies
- Meso strategies
- Micro strategies

Questions?

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