

Dr. Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec

July 27, 2015

Dear President Shepard:

Further to our letter of July 24, we wish to bring to your attention and public attention our concerns regarding the following public statements made by Concordia.

In Le Journal de Montréal of July 25, the Director of the Luc Beauregard Centre of Excellence in Communications Research, Prof. Jordan LeBel, stated:

«Les donateurs n'ont pas de droit de regard sur nos recherches. On a un comité d'éthique», soutient Jordan LeBel, directeur du Centre d'excellence Luc Beauregard de recherche en communication de Concordia, qui a financé le document. Le Pr LeBel souligne que les opinions exprimées par l'auteur, M. Aylen, lui sont propres et ne reflètent pas nécessairement celles du centre de recherche. «On ne se positionne pas sur l'impartialité et l'excellence», précise-t-il.

We are shocked that Prof. LeBel states that the Centre d'excellence Luc Beauregard de recherche en communication does not take any responsibility for the impartiality and academic quality of a report that it commissioned, funded, published on Concordia's letterhead and promoted on Concordia University's website.

Would you please confirm whether this statement by Prof. LeBel is, indeed, correct? If it is correct, then the Centre should, in our view, remove the word "Excellence" from its name, since, according to Prof. LeBel's statement, the Centre takes no responsibility to uphold standards of academic or ethical excellence in its reports. The academic community and the public place trust in Concordia to uphold proper academic and ethical standards. If, as Prof. LeBel's statement indicates, Concordia takes no responsibility to uphold the academic and ethical standards of work it commissions, funds, publishes on its letterhead and promotes, then this should be clearly disclosed on Concordia's website and policy statements.

We are also troubled by the fact that Prof. LeBel omits the issues we raised in our complaint – namely inaccuracies, irresponsible statements that harm public health, bias and undisclosed conflict of interest and instead substitutes an issue we did not raise: that donors do not have the right to oversee the Centre's research.

2) We believe that the following statement by Concordia in the Montreal Gazette is also misleading:

“Members of our community publish thousands of pieces annually, and in the spirit of academic freedom they can do so on any topic or issue,” wrote spokesperson Cléa Desjardins in an email.

The statement misrepresents the issue we have raised. It is not an issue of freedom of speech. It is an issue concerning Concordia’s academic and ethical standards. In addition, the university does not commission, fund, publish on its official letterhead and promote on the Concordia website “thousands of pieces” written by the Concordia community, as it did for Aylen’s paper.

REQUEST

- We ask for your assurance, as President of the University, that whoever carries out the review of the serious issues raised in our letter will be truly independent and without conflicts of interest.
- We request to know to whom the person selected to carry out the review will be accountable and what will Concordia do to ensure that the process from start to finish is completely transparent.
- It is important that the review not only addresses Mr. Aylen’s paper, but also addresses the systemic failure at Concordia which allowed Concordia to commission, fund, approve, publish and promote a paper that does not meet the most minimal academic and ethical standards, that was written by someone with extreme conflict of interest and that contributes to harm of public health. The review should put forward concrete proposals that include proper oversight to ensure that such violations of academic and ethical standards do not occur again.

We look forward to receiving your response on these serious matters.

Sincerely,

KATHLEEN RUFF, senior human rights adviser, Rideau Institute, Ottawa; author, *Exporting Harm: how Canada Markets Asbestos to the Developing World*

DR. FERNAND TURCOTTE, MD, MPH, FRCPC, Professor Emeritus of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Université Laval, Québec

DR. ABBY LIPPMAN, PhD, Professor Emerita, Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Occupational Health, McGill University; Research Associate, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec

DR JOHN R. KEYSERLINGK, MD, MSc, FRCS(C), FACS, Director, Medicine & Surgical Oncology, Ville Marie Oncology Center, Montréal, Québec

DR. ÉRIC NOTEBAERT, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine, Université de Montréal, Québec; director, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

DR. MICHELINE BEAUDRY, PhD, professeure retraitée de nutrition publique (Université Laval); Commission santé, conditions de vie et services sociaux, Québec solidaire, Québec

DR. LOUISE VANDELAC, PhD, Professeure titulaire, Institut des sciences de l'environnement et Département de sociologie, Université du Québec à Montréal, Québec

DR. YV BONNIER-VIGER, MD, MSc, MM, CMSQ, FRCPC, Médecin spécialiste en santé publique et médecine préventive; Professeur-directeur du Département de médecine sociale et préventive de la Faculté de Médecine de l'Université Laval, Québec

DR. COLIN L. SOSKOLNE, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Edmonton; Adjunct Professor [July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2016], Faculty of Health, University of Canberra, Australia; Chair, International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (IJPC-SE); Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy

DR. BRUCE P. LANPHEAR, MD, MPH, Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC

NOTE:

Titles and affiliations are given for identification purposes only.

As it is the summer period, some of the signers of our letter of July 24 are currently away.

Copy to:

Prof. Jordan LeBel, Director, Luc Beauregard Centre of Excellence in Communications Research

Dr. Steve Harvey, Dean, John Molson School of Business