

# TESTIMONIES

Adverse effects from fragrances/perfumes/scents in a hospital facility

## Michèle Chantal

Right now, I am sitting in a medical clinic. As soon as I walked into the waiting room, I immediately smelled a strong smell of perfume. I almost had to get out of the waiting room even though there was only one person there who told me that she had used perfume that morning. What a strong smell! I have rarely encountered a doctor or nurse who smelled so strongly of perfume, but not being able to access the waiting room (and we know how long the wait is) because of someone wearing perfume in the health care system, becomes very annoying. A ban on perfume should apply to patients as well. There was a time when doctors did not smoke but patients did. We know that time spent in the waiting room is longer than in the doctor's office. So, this did not make sense. It's the same thing for perfumes. Thank you for your actions in the field of environmental sensitivities.

## Nathalie Prince

I would say that the amount of chemicals used within a hospital could be reduced. Indeed, the hospital air is very difficult for me to breathe because the odour of perfume is multiplied by the hospital's air-conditioning system, and the perfumed products circulate throughout the hospital.

In hospitals, when I am in contact with air saturated by this chemical load, I feel badly and I begin to lose my sense of orientation. I have trouble concentrating. My attention and my sight are negatively affected. People come to help me with certain tasks, at home, and when they wear scents in my home, I feel very bad and that triggers headaches, etc.

I think this is not only related to the smell, but to the tiny chemical molecules that have a certain action on the body of persons like me who are chemically sensitive.

## Line Fournier

If hospitals had a respected scent free policy, I could go to the hospital without having to wait for hours in a waiting room with people I can not bear to be near, because I am overwhelmed by the fragrance they use. Not to mention the hospital staff who do not care to respect the so-called protocol of the "scent-free" regulation. Indeed, for me, the hospital represents suffering and non-compliance, because even if we complain, we are always told that they respect the famous protocol. This is false. The worst part of all this is when you wait a long time in this toxic fog and then find yourself in front of a doctor who, makes fun of you to your face when he notices in your file that you suffer from MCS, which he calls a 'presumed illness', even though you actually are consulting him for an unrelated health problem.

I hope one day to see that all hospitals in Québec have a scent-free policy. That would be a balm to those of us who have become ill from the environment, and already find life painful enough.

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## **Marlene B.**

I had an appointment to see a cardiologist at the Montreal Cardiology Institute, as my arrhythmia was causing me severe difficulties. The waiting room was full of both adults and children. Since I suffer from chemical sensitivity I had brought along my own oxygen and was using it while waiting to see the doctor.

The use of oxygen was not sufficient. The chemicals from perfumes, colognes, fabric softeners and laundry soap were permeating my oxygen mask even though I had raised the intake levels as high as possible.

I asked to be placed in a separate room free from all the fragrances. I was told that this was not possible.

It was a good hour before it was my turn. I was in terrible pain from all the perfume exposure. I was bent over, gasping for air. This was not a concern to any of the staff.

Finally, I entered an air-conditioned corridor and had my session with the doctor. An EKG was ordered for me. When the technician arrived, he had perfumed gel in his hair. My body went into convulsions and they put me in a wheel chair. My husband wheeled me outside on the driveway so I could breathe better air, and I slowly recovered there. That was my experience: when I really needed help from the medical system, they did not understand or care about my need for clean air, nor about my physical reactions to perfumes.

## **M. Higgins**

I was admitted to a Montreal hospital for observation. I was given a bed in the cardiac ward and my troubles began. The fragrances in the bedsheets, pillows, nurses clothing, other patients' perfumes, hair spray, cleaning solutions were all intolerable.

My lungs were burning, my airways seemed to be obstructed. I asked for my clothes and put them under my head, then asked for more of my clothes and put them over the pillow. By this time, I could see that the nurse was losing patience with me.

I was still having immense difficulty breathing. Visitors came in and out of the small ward bringing their perfumes and hair products with them. My desperation increased as the evening wore on.

When they mopped the floor, I thought I would not make it. I noticed a window in the corner that had a crack in it. In desperation I asked to be moved there. This space was a bit removed from everyone else. With great scepticism I was moved. And that is how I survived the night, breathing the air that came through the broken window. By morning I had very deep, dark circles under my eyes. It was a horrible experience.

I would like my medical condition to be respected. I would like to be in a hospital with clean air that uses unscented, least toxic alternatives around their patients. Today, even if I have an emergency, I opt not to go to a hospital. Health care is not available to me because of my disability.

## Frances B.

This happened at the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency at 4 am. Feeling exceedingly unwell for several days, I debated about going to the Emergency. Finally, at 4 am one morning, my frightened husband insisted on driving to the Royal Vic. We arrived and were questioned repeatedly as to why we arrived at that hour.

We explained that I was in serious distress and also suffered from multiple chemical sensitivity, and had been fearful of entering a hospital as I was concerned about the perfumes and other products used in hospitals.

We waited my turn to see an ER doctor but unfortunately the perfume smells from the patients in the waiting room were affecting me so much that I had trouble breathing.

I waited outside the hospital in the driveway. My husband called me on my phone and told me it was my turn. Unfortunately, just as I went in the cleaning person had just dropped a glass container full of incredibly strong smelling solvent. I became desperate as I was in agony trying to breathe.

One of the younger doctors grabbed me and whisked me into a spare examining room and told me to try and recover my breath.

He explained that he was not allowed to do this but as he saw what was happening, he made the decision and did an EKG in that room, asking us to say nothing to anyone about it.

I recovered slowly and had my cardio exam and was admitted overnight. That turned out to be a nightmare with all the perfumes, colognes and other scented products.

I dread any kind of hospital visits and will do everything possible not to enter as a patient.