



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Refusal to Treat PEI Patient Needing Abortion Aftercare is Serious Violation of Medical Ethics

NATIONAL – Two doctors denied treatment to a woman at a Charlottetown hospital in PEI on May 21, because she was seeking aftercare for a medical abortion. The shocking incident occurred last Thursday. The woman, Courtney Cudmore, has since [gone public with her story](#) and says she intends to bring legal action against the hospital.

Cudmore had taken medication to end her pregnancy, but the drugs did not appear to be working, so she went to the Emergency Department at Charlottetown's Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) for follow-up care. According to Cudmore, the attending physician, Dr. Lantz, refused to examine her even though she was bleeding and had been waiting over five hours. After consulting with the gynecologist on duty, Dr. Lantz told Cudmore: "Well, we are not comfortable dealing with this situation." He advised her to travel to Halifax for treatment, a four-hour journey. (PEI is the only province in Canada that does not provide abortion services.) Cudmore finally managed to get the treatment she needed from her fiancée's doctor.

Incredibly, PEI's Health Minister Doug Currie [told the media](#) that "all proper protocols were followed" and that "the standard quality of care was followed." As Cudmore herself said after telling her story, "Does that sound like protocol?? If it is, my god I never want to see them fuck something up."

"What happened to this young woman was frightening and inexcusable, and we applaud Ms. Cudmore's courage in coming forward," said Josie Baker, a PEI-based spokesperson for the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, and a member of the PEI Abortion Rights Network. "Refusal of treatment for reproductive care is a serious problem that needs recognition and action." Baker noted that other women have also been unable to access follow-up care after a medical abortion in PEI, referring to [research by Dr. Colleen MacQuarrie](#) that detailed the barriers and hurdles faced by PEI women seeking abortions.

The Charlottetown QEH has a policy to not turn patients away without treatment, as do other hospitals in Canada. But ARCC's Executive Director, Joyce Arthur, said it can happen anyway, because doctors are generally allowed to refuse care that conflicts with their personal and religious beliefs, such as abortion or contraception. "The practice of so-called 'conscientious objection' in reproductive healthcare must end. It's a serious violation of medical ethics because it puts the health and lives of patients in danger and infringes their rights," said Arthur. "If

doctors' personal beliefs prevent them from carrying out their professional obligations, which they took an oath to fulfill, they are frankly unfit for the job and should resign. Refusal of treatment should also be grounds for malpractice or loss of license.”

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada supports the recommended actions outlined by the PEI Abortion Rights Network (ARN) in its May 22 [Open Letter](#) to Premier H. Wade MacLauchlan and Health Minister Doug Currie. Josie Baker (of both ARCC and ARN) says: “The most urgent requirement is to implement local access to safe, legal surgical abortion. We also need to establish a policy framework for medication-based abortions, which should have local surgical backup as well as a provincial billing code. Further, Health PEI must lift the veil of secrecy over abortion care by providing more information about the service and how to access it.”

— 30 —

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