

Défi-Santé, the Health Challenge

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The CSSS des Sommets, the health and social services establishment that serves the region covered by the MRC des Laurentides and a few of its neighbouring communities, is leading the province with an innovative programme to identify and help the people who suffer from chronic diseases and have the highest use of health services. The main goal of the project was to improve their quality of life in their community by reducing their number of visits to the hospital.

Called the *Défi-Santé* or Health Challenge, the programme got off the ground with the financial help of the provincial ministry of health and social services (MSSS) and the deGaspé Beaubien Foundation, which also helped find the technical and planning resources to make the project possible. The Castonguay Report, released last spring, cites the CSSS des Sommets as an institution exemplifying best practices in the province's health care system by helping guide clients towards more appropriate community-based alternatives and, at the same time, prevent repetitive use of costly care in the emergency room and in the hospital.

Under the leadership of France Laframboise, the Director of Quality of Care and Services, and Dr. Jean Mireault, the medical coordinator, 200 people who had the greatest number of visits to the emergency department, to the hospital and to the CLSCs were identified. Once this was done, each person was met to determine the reasons for the high number of visits, including their underlying health but also many other factors such as their use of other services, their family situations, educational and socio-economic conditions, etc.

With the active implication of the family doctor and a case manager in the community, this information then allowed a "dynamic" and "proactive" approach, dealing with the issues that were identified rather than waiting for the client to approach the facility for services. The results have been remarkable. At the start of the project, those 200 clients represented 5.3% of visits to the emergency department, 11.5% of all hospitalisations and 9.4% of CLSC interventions. Nine months after instituting the programme, these numbers had shifted to only 1.6% of emergency visits and 3% of hospitalisations and the number of CLSC interventions had grown to 11%. The results have also shown improvements in two aspects of the quality of life: psychological distress and physical pain. Given that the number of people theoretically served by the CSSS des Sommets is close to 45,000, you can see that just a few people need a tremendous proportion of the services, even with the improvements noted above. In fact, the literature confirms that only 3% of the population uses up to 50% of the hospital beds in industrialized countries and the CSSS des Sommets is no different. This is why institutions have to personalize their approach to care.

The Health Challenge isn't about health outcomes, though. That is a completely different issue and is addressed in many different ways, predominantly in the relationship between a patient and the clinicians in the community. What the Health Challenge is about is the way that those clinicians work together to make the system run smoothly, with continuity of care, to ensure timely and appropriate care for everyone who needs it. Although only the top 200 users of the services were identified, and continue to be followed, the improvements made in the delivery of care benefit everyone who walks through the doors of the hospital, the CLSCs and the long-term care facilities administered by the CSSS des Sommets.

With such positive results, and the recognition that has begun to be felt, the spirit of collaboration among all the players is growing. The staff and management of the CSSS des Sommets are rightly proud of its accomplishments and are working hard to keep improving.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets