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Father's long crusade for answers

Daughter lost cancer battle after turning to naturopathic therapy

By **DONNA CASEY, OTTAWA SUN**

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Patrick McDougall hopes a College of Physicians and Surgeons disciplinary hearing this week will give him answers to questions about the care his daughter Kathleen received before dying of cancer in 2003. Tony Caldwell/QMI Agency

Sitting at his dining room table, Patrick McDougall flips through a sheaf of papers that detail a long battle he has soldiered mostly alone.

He's an 80-year-old grandfather who lives in a west-end apartment with his wife Marie. In his free time, he keeps limber with aquafit classes and mentors young immigrant children at nearby schools.

But casting a glance at the table blanketed with file folders, McDougall admits his preoccupation with an Ottawa-based cancer care group offering naturopathic treatment has consumed him for nearly 10 years.

"It's become my obsession," said McDougall, a retired broadcaster, as he thumbs through dozens of dismissive letters from bureaucrats at health ministries and regulatory bodies.

In May 2003, McDougall's daughter died of cancer, five years after she was first diagnosed with breast cancer.

When her cancer returned in 2001, Kathleen McDougall, who lived in Montreal with her husband and young daughter, decided to follow a treatment regime offered by the Canadian Cancer Research Group (CCRG).

In documents Kathleen received from the CCRG, cancer is described "not so much a proliferative disease but rather an immune system disorder."

The documents say that through blood testing and laboratory analysis, the CCRG's scientific team created an "orthomolecular and functional formula designed to shift the patient's biochemistry and metabolism."

In plain terms, the group created pills with a patented mixture of vitamins, minerals and amino acids for patients with breast, prostate and other cancers.

For clients like Kathleen McDougall, that meant shunning conventional treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation and surgery and signing up for the CCRG's holistic-type treatments — with an annual fee of \$10,000.

Now, an Ottawa doctor who once served as the company's medical director, faces a disciplinary hearing Tuesday with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

According to a notice of hearing from the college, Eoghan O'Shea was the CCRG's medical director from 2000 to 2002 and from September 2005 to June 2006.

During this time, the college alleges O'Shea "failed to maintain the standard of practice of the profession in, among other things, his practice of complementary medicine."

Among the claims by the regulatory body overseeing Ontario's doctors, it is alleged that O'Shea failed to obtain informed consent before prescribing medical treatment.

The college also alleges O'Shea didn't communicate with the family doctors or oncologists of CCRG patients and didn't chart his discussions with those doctors.

The hearing comes nearly eight years after McDougall wrote his first letter of complaint to the provincial college about O'Shea, who now serves as the vice-president of the Academy of Medicine Ottawa, which represents most of Ottawa's 700 family doctors.

In a brief interview with the Sun last week, O'Shea said he is no longer employed by the CCRG or Immune System Management, a company headed by the same CEO, William O'Neill, and located on Fifth Ave. in the Glebe.

"I am unable to comment at this time," said O'Shea, adding he resigned from ISM in June 2006, adding any reference to him as ISM's medical director on websites is "unauthorized."

With the exception of a feature program by CTV's W5 in 2006, the CCRG ran its business in relative obscurity.

In the W5 feature, O'Neill, the CEO of the CCRG, told a prospective client — a CTV producer with a hidden camera who posed as lung cancer patient — that "it's more therapeutic to drink cold beer" than to do chemotherapy, radiation and surgery.

Kathleen McDougall received a similarly rosy picture from documents she received when she signed up for the CCRG's treatment regime, according to her father.

The documents list one-year survival rates for late-stage cancers, comparing the rates of the CCRG's immunotherapy treatment and Health Canada's statistics for surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.

The CCRG documents boast a 100% one-year survival rate for ovarian and prostate cancers, compared to 39% and 74% rates respectively noted by Health Canada.

"That's what they gave her. That's what they give to vulnerable cancer patients," said McDougall.

In 2006, a respected cancer research charity started losing donors when it was mistaken for the CCRG following the W5 program.

Officials with the Cancer Research Society — a national not-for-profit organization that awards \$6 million annually to hospital and university cancer researchers — fired off a letter to then-federal health minister Tony Clement saying organizations like the CCRG "greatly harm the credibility" of cancer researchers.

"We are always a bit concerned with claims of finding a magic bullet or a cure," said Dr. Mario Chevette, the president of the CRS.

Calls made to O'Neill requesting an interview were not returned.

Patrick McDougall acknowledges he's been largely a solitary voice in his pursuit of the CCRG.

"I don't feel I'm a crusader," said McDougall, recalling how he felt helpless when Kathleen continued to take the CCRG-prescribed vitamins and whey powder pills during her dying months when cancer had taken over her spine.

Other families have told him they want to move on.

"They say 'We want to forget it.' They don't want the memory of that to mess up the rest of their lives,' " said McDougall.

While the disciplinary committee panel of the College of Physicians and Surgeons could bar O'Shea from practicing medicine, McDougall said he isn't expecting much from the hearing.

"I have no high hopes," said McDougall, adding O'Shea is "probably a pretty good doctor."

But McDougall has questions that only a father could ask. And he hopes this hearing answers them.

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