

Le Pharmachien denounces a cyberbullying campaign against him

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Pharmacist and television host Oliver Bernard. Photo: CBC / Arcouette & Co.

by Bouchra Ouatik

Pharmacist and science communicator Oliver Bernard denounces a cyberbullying campaign he has been targeting since he questioned the effectiveness of vitamin C injections in cancer treatment. These injections are not allowed in Quebec, but tens of thousands of people have signed a petition on their behalf, sponsored by politician Yuri Chassin.

Olivier Bernard, who writes the blog *Le Pharmachien* in which he comments on scientific news, published this summer [an article on vitamin C injections in the treatment of cancer](#). In his text, he questions the effectiveness of this approach, citing scientific studies on the subject.

On Monday morning, Mr. Bernard explained that he had received threats from Internet users who said they wanted to "*make [him] pay*". He indicates that his critics have lobbied to try to make him lose his television show, which he runs on the Explora channel, and have prompted the public to file a complaint

"massively" to the Quebec Order of Pharmacists. He added that the harassment also targeted his spouse, the author India Desjardins.



As a result of these events, Le Pharmachien says he had to come forward publicly on these issues.

"Yesterday [Sunday] evening, I felt that I had reached the limit of what I am able to take psychologically in this case."

- Olivier Bernard

A situation denounced

The Association of Science Communicators of Quebec (ACS) reacted strongly to this situation. *"There is a public denunciation of any form of harassment, intimidation, criticism or threats of any kind that Olivier Bernard has received"*, says Laurène Smagghe.

"It's not normal for that to reach that level when it's just stating scientific facts."

- Laurène Smagghe, ACS Acting President

According to her, such reactions show that some people misunderstand the role of scientists. *"It shows that there is a lack of communicators and science extensionists who take the time to explain to the general public what science does, what scientists do, what is a study"*, she says.

Mrs. Smagghe fears the effect this will have on other scientists, who may be reluctant to talk about their research.

"If we do not talk about some controversial issues, we will not be able to talk about much, because, unfortunately, there are a lot of topics that involve very important scientific issues that are controversial."

- Laurène Smagghe, ACS Acting President

Harassment that affects many areas of science

Such cases of intimidation against scientists are still rare in Quebec, but the situation is becoming more widespread south of the border. American geneticist Kevin Folta says he has been subjected to constant harassment for several years because of his work on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

"Every day, people attack me on social networks. Robots are programmed to spread negative information about me daily. There are websites on me", says the researcher, who teaches at the University of Florida.



Dr. Folta notes that several scientific themes trigger hostile reactions from certain groups: climate, genetic engineering, vaccination, fluoridation of water, nuclear energy, diets.

"People who do not support these sectors find that scientists are very embarrassing and want to eliminate us from the conversation or, at least, destroy the trust we have gained."

- Kevin Folta, Genetics Researcher, University of Florida

Despite harassment, Kevin Folta continues to speak publicly about his work and encourages other scientists to do the same. *"There is only one solution: to continue to do good work, and to continue writing, speaking, and expressing ourselves where we are asked."*

The National Assembly will not consider the petition on vitamin C and cancer

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CAQ politician Yuri Chassin sponsored this petition.

by Patrice Bergeron

QUÉBEC - The National Assembly will not finally consider a controversial vitamin C petition for cancer treatment that has collected nearly 120,000 signatures.

In working session on Thursday, the elected representatives of the various parties gathered at the Committee on Health and Social Services decided not to seize the petition. The decision was taken unanimously, particularly because of the "*lack of credible studies on the subject*", according to a source who wished to remain anonymous.

This petition was sponsored by the CAQ deputy of Saint-Jérôme, Yuri Chassin, who deposited it on March 19th. It argued that vitamin C *"can significantly reduce the side effects of chemotherapy and thus increase the quality of life of patients."*

It also asked for the establishment of a *"Quebec Vitamin C Perfusion Registry"*, to authorize doctors to prescribe vitamin C, as well as to document the safety and efficacy of high-dose vitamin C in cases of vitamin C as a complementary medical treatment for cancer.

The pharmacist Olivier Bernard, nicknamed "Le Pharmachien" and known for his role as scientific popularizer, had questioned this filing at the Assembly. He saw it as a *"political lobbying strategy that bypasses the scientific process, with risks for medicine and public health"*.

Mr. Bernard had questioned directly Mr. Chassin, asking him why a petition, a parliamentary commission, or a register on the injection of vitamin C, as the petition asks, would allow to learn more about the scientific evidence regarding vitamin C injections.

"Le Pharmachien" had denounced receiving several threats for taking a stand on this issue.