

Quebec health minister cuts medical school admissions

Written by Mark Cardwell on July 10, 2017 for [The Medical Post](#)

Quebec City – Quebec Health Minister Dr. Gaétan Barrette says he is only following the wishes of the province’s medical regulator and officials at its four medical schools. But his announcement on Friday that he is cutting medical school admissions by 17 spots this fall, and the same number in each of the next two years, has left some medical stakeholders in la belle province shaking their heads.



Dr. Gaétan Barrette

“We have enough (doctors),” Dr. Barrette told journalists on Friday. “People have been telling me to cut the number of admissions for three years, and I’m finally doing it for the first time.”

The health minister said he made the decision based on a recent government projection that at the current rate of 850 medical school graduates a year, Quebec would have a surplus of 600 family doctors and 500 specialists in Quebec within 20 years.

He added that reducing the number of admissions by 17 in each the next three years, for a total of 51, would help to reduce those projected surpluses.

Dr. Barrette said he was open to an annual readjustment of the numbers if needed. “I prefer to be a little more high than low,” he said when asked if the 51-seat cut was too aggressive for dealing with the projected surplus.

The minister added that the cuts will save the province money. “It costs a lot (to train doctors) and we want to avoid medical overconsumption like we see in Europe,” Dr. Barrette told reporters.

The announcement was met with both incredulity and ridicule by some critics.

The president of the Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec—the FMOQ, which represents the province’s 9,000 family doctors—questioned both the timing and impact of the admission cuts. “Unemployed doctors are not at all a reality we face (and) we can absorb the coming cohorts,” Dr. Louis Godin told the *Journal de Montréal*.

He also noted that Quebec was the only province in Canada that failed to fill all its vacancies in family medicine in 2017. The province was left with a staggering 50 vacancies in family medicine, 29 of them at Université Laval alone. Dr. Godin also questioned the reliability of the data Dr. Barrette used to make the decision to cut admissions.

He noted, for example, that the government's projections are based on a majority of medical school graduates—55%—choosing family medicine as a career path. That percentage is currently below 50%.

For his part, the president of Quebec's 3,800-member Fédération des médecins résidents du Québec, a professional union that represents resident associations at Quebec's four medical schools, believes admission cuts are a necessary evil. "If we keep the same numbers of admissions we will have a surplus," Dr. Christopher Lemieux told the *Journal de Montréal*.

He added however that more needs to be done to ensure a more balanced repartition of students entering medical specialties. "In some fields, especially specialized surgeries, there are too many residents for the positions available," said Dr. Lemieux.

The result, he added, is the exodus of highly-trained doctors to other jurisdictions. He said residents should be directed to fields with growing demand, like geriatrics.