



Charter of Quebec Values: RPCU fears for rights of health and social services network users

Montreal, Sept. 5, 2013 – The health and social services network user committees group, the Regroupement provincial des comités des usagers (RPCU), has a number of concerns about the Charter of Quebec Values proposed by the government of Quebec. The RPCU feels that the secular nature of the State should be evident through the neutrality of its actions, not through a prohibition on the wearing of religious symbols either by the individuals who provide services or by those who receive them. Does the wearing of religious symbols by government employees really prevent the neutrality of the State? It is not the religious symbols that pose a problem, but rather the proselytizing that we may associate with them.

Users of the health and social services network should be welcomed and respected when they come to network facilities. Will they feel at ease coming to a facility wearing their religious symbols? Will they, in turn, be asked to remove them? *"Will users also be bound by rules? What happens if a woman wearing a veil arrives in an emergency room?"* asked Claude Ménard, Chairman of the RPCU. *"Will she be told that she has to remove her veil so she can be identified?"*

The RPCU is also concerned that religious practices will be banned from residential and long-term care centres (CHSLD). A majority of the elderly in-patients are practising Catholics, and Sunday mass is anxiously awaited. The same is true for in-patients of other faiths, Jews or Muslims, for example. *"Would this mean that masses and chaplains will be subject to the Charter? What about rabbis and imams?"* asked RPCU Director General Pierre Blain. *"If we're obliged to ban all forms of religious expression and symbols, user rights to practice a religion would be trampled."*

"Although there is a great deal of talk about the proposed Charter of Quebec Values, users of the health and social services network have more pressing concerns, such as abolition of the health tax and access to a family physician. We hope that the debate over the Charter of Quebec Values does not overshadow the needs of public health system users," concluded Blain.

About the RPCU

The Regroupement provincial des comités des usagers (RPCU) advocates on behalf of users and is the spokesperson for the 600 user and in-patient committees in Quebec's health and social services establishments. The committees' mission is to defend users' rights and work to improve the quality of services provided to users of the health and social services network. The RPCU also advocates for the elderly.