

Jehovah's Witness, 14, ordered to receive blood transfusion despite beliefs

Treatment for Hodgkin's lymphoma can require transfusion, which the religion's doctrine prohibits

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A Quebec Superior Court ruling, issued Sept. 1, allows the MUHC to provide blood transfusions and other necessary blood treatments to a 14-year-old girl with Hodgkin's lymphoma for one month. (Ryan Remiorz/Canadian Press)

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The McGill University Health Centre has been authorized to perform blood transfusions to treat a 14-year-old girl with cancer, despite her refusal because it goes against her beliefs as a Jehovah's Witness.

In a ruling issued earlier this month, Superior Court Justice Lukasz Granosik concluded that it is lawful to protect a child, sometimes

even against their own wishes, when their decision can be fatal or irreversibly alter their lives.

The teen, identified only as "X" because she is a minor, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in June 2017 and treated with chemotherapy.

Although Granosik noted that X exhibited a high level of maturity, he ultimately concluded: "The need for a blood transfusion should be considered to save the life of X or avoid permanent damage to her physical integrity."

'Chance of cure at risk,' doctor warned

The treatment has a success rate of 97 per cent with an 85 per cent chance there would be no recurrence. It can, however, require blood transfusions, which are forbidden under Jehovah's Witness doctrine.

Her doctor, aware the teen and her mother were opposed to a transfusion, tried to avoid having to give one.

But in August 2017, following the third round of chemotherapy, her doctor grew increasingly concerned the teen would require a transfusion because of her low platelet count, which can lead to fatal hemorrhaging.

"I am concerned that X and her family will continue to make changes in her treatment plan that are not medically sound and put her chance of cure at risk," her hematologist-oncologist, identified only as Dr. Sabapathy, wrote later the same month.

"I am therefore asking the court to give us permission to transfuse X blood products if needed to [treat] any life threatening drop in her blood counts."

MUHC allowed to perform transfusions

The ruling, issued Sept. 1, allowed the MUHC to provide blood transfusions and other necessary blood treatments for one month, in an effort to treat her cancer and prevent her death.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly examined the right of Jehovah's Witnesses to refuse blood transfusions.

In the case of minors, the key decision comes from Manitoba and dates back to 2009.

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In a six-to-one decision, the Supreme Court ruled that a minor should have the opportunity to make decisions of a medical nature, but that the court must have the power to intervene when a human life is in danger.

The Quebec government, meanwhile, [has faced pressure to ammend the province's Civil Code](#) when it comes to adults, after a Jehovah's Witness woman died six days after she gave birth in October 2016.

Éloïse Dupuis's refusal of an emergency blood transfusion to treat a hemorrhage prompted family members and medical ethicists to push for staff at Quebec hospitals to be allowed to administer life-saving treatment in such circumstances.

With files from The Canadian Press