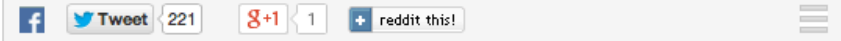


News / GTA

Sick Kids shuts down hair tests at Motherisk lab

Decision comes after a Star investigation into tests used in criminal and child protection cases across Canada.



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The Hospital for Sick Children announced on Friday it has permanently discontinued hair drug and alcohol tests at its Motherisk Drug Testing Laboratory.

By: [Rachel Mendleson](#) News reporter, Published on Fri Apr 17 2015

The Hospital for Sick Children has permanently discontinued hair drug and alcohol tests at its embattled [Motherisk](#) Drug Testing Laboratory after an internal review “further explored and validated” previous, and as yet undisclosed, “questions and concerns.”

The decision, announced on Friday, comes amid a Star investigation and mounting pressure from critics to shutter the lab, whose hair drug and alcohol tests have been used in criminal and child protection cases across the country, typically as evidence of parental substance abuse.

“Over the past six weeks, the hospital has continued to review its decision to suspend the laboratory’s operations,” Sick Kids said in a statement. “The hospital has concluded that this laboratory service is not required for its ongoing operations.”

The province appointed retired Appeal Court Justice Susan Lang late last year to probe the reliability and accuracy of five years’ worth of drug hair tests performed by Motherisk, from 2005 to 2010.

In March, Sick Kids temporarily suspended all non-research operations at Motherisk, after Lang’s review and the hospital’s review revealed new information, pending the results of Lang’s review, which are expected by June 30.

The hospital has declined to elaborate on the nature of that information. A hospital spokeswoman said on Friday that Sick Kids is not taking media inquiries.

Toronto lawyer James Lockyer, who [criticized the hospital’s secrecy](#) in his submissions to Lang on behalf of the Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted, called the hospital’s silence “disquieting.”

“It is a drastic decision, to permanently close down an important operation which, until recently, the hospital was strongly defending,” he said. “The ‘wait and see until the independent review is completed’ only (heightens) concerns about what went wrong.”

Criminal lawyer Daniel Brown, who urged Lang to broaden her review on Motherisk in the submissions he helped prepare for the Criminal Lawyers' Association, said the hospital "has an immediate obligation to publicly share the results of their internal review so that problems identified during that review can be swiftly corrected."

In its statement Friday, Sick Kids said it would not provide further details to "maintain the ongoing integrity of the independent review."

"We understand the public may want more information on the findings that have led the hospital to make this decision, and we believe that it is most appropriate for that disclosure to come through the independent review," the hospital said.

[Health Minister Eric Hoskins](#) refused to answer questions on why there is so much secrecy surrounding the problems uncovered at Motherisk and instead issued a statement by email about Lang's review.

"The independent review is ongoing and we have confidence in the work that is being carried out by the Honourable Susan Lang," he said.

Sick Kids recently temporarily reassigned medical oversight of Motherisk, which also counsels pregnant women on which medications are safe to take, amid questions from the Star about the ties between Motherisk director and founder Gideon Koren and the drug company Duchesnay.

The questions related to the lack of disclosure of the funding Motherisk receives from Duchesnay in a booklet for pregnant women co-written by Koren and featured on the Motherisk website, which heavily promotes the use of Duchesnay's drug Diclectin to treat morning sickness.

The hospital has said it is aware of the concerns about Koren and Duchesnay and is continuing to investigate. It has declined to comment on whether Koren has been removed as director of Motherisk. Koren did not respond to a request for comment on Friday.

The Star investigation of Motherisk began late last year, when an Appeal Court overturned the cocaine-related convictions of [Toronto mom Tamara Broomfield](#) after fresh evidence criticized the hair drug tests results Koren presented at her 2009 trial.

Broomfield was sentenced to seven years in prison for feeding her toddler cocaine after Koren testified that tests of her son's hair showed that he had regularly consumed large amounts of the drug for more than a year leading up to a near-fatal 2005 overdose.



Operations of Motherisk Drug Testing Lab Closed

April 17, 2015 (Toronto) - The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) announced today that it will not be reinstating the non-research related activities of the Motherisk Drug Testing Laboratory. The Government of Ontario launched an independent review of the Motherisk hair analysis program, with the full support of SickKids, in November of 2014. The Honourable Susan Lang has been leading the independent review.

Based on information available in November 2014, SickKids made the decision to continue operating the drug testing laboratory. On March 5, 2015 as a result of new information arising from the ongoing analysis by the hospital and the independent review by Justice Lang, SickKids suspended the operations of the laboratory.

Over the past six weeks, the hospital has continued to review its decision to suspend the laboratory's operations. Questions and concerns have been further explored and validated. The hospital has concluded that this laboratory service is not required for its ongoing operations. For these reasons, the operations of the laboratory will not be reinstated.

To maintain the ongoing integrity of the independent review, SickKids will not be taking media inquiries at this time. We understand the public may want more information on the findings that have led the hospital to make this decision, and we believe that it is most appropriate for that disclosure to come through the independent review.

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Lockyer represented Broomfield at the Appeal Court. The fresh evidence he presented came from Craig Chatterton, deputy chief toxicologist in the office of the chief medical examiner in Edmonton, who challenged Motherisk's findings and said the method the lab used to test the boy's hair was a preliminary screening test, and the result should have been confirmed with a gold-standard test.

The terms of the independent review were set after Sick Kids told the Star it started using the gold-standard test to analyze hair for cocaine in 2010.

When she announced the review, Attorney General Madeleine Meilleur said it was the first step that could spark a larger inquiry.

The Criminal Lawyers' Association, the Family Lawyers Association, the Innocence Project and the Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted have since called for the scope to be broadened.

Toronto lawyer Katharina Janczaruk, chair of the Family Lawyers Association, said on Friday that the hospital's announcement bolsters the case for expanding the review beyond 2010, to include whatever new information has arisen about more recent issues in the lab.

"We have a right to know what the new information is because it may have an impact on current cases," she said.

A spokesman for the review declined to comment on the news from Sick Kids on Friday.

With files from Rob Ferguson