

Dear Members of the SCE,

A number of you have written me, asking my thoughts on the appointment of Dr. Prigent to the Governing Council and the petition that is currently circulating. Attached, please find a note that outlines my response. Sorry for not getting this to you sooner; I have been out of the country most of this past week and just returned late Thursday evening.

I also wanted to let you know that our Strategic Plan was presented to Governing Council. While it was well received, it was decided to first have it approved by Scientific Council, following which it will return to GC for formal approval.

Kind regards,

harvey

Harvey Max Chochinov OM FRSC
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See attached letter to the
Standing Committee on Ethics
below

11/26/09

Dr. Harvey Max Chochinov
Chair, Standing Committee on Ethics
Member of the Governing Council, CIHR

Re: Appointment of Dr. Prigent to Governing Council of the CIHR

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Ethics,

I would like to address some of the concerns raised at our last meeting regarding the appointment of Dr. Prigent to the CIHR Governing Council. Although I could not attend the entire meeting—due to the sudden illness and untimely death of my father-in-law—the message conveyed to me was that the SCE was uneasy, and wished me to convey the implications and nuances of this appointment to Governing Council.

I think you all appreciate the esteem with which I hold the opinion of SCE. As such, I can tell you that your detailed concerns were conveyed to the Governing Council, as well as CIHR Senior Management. After a lengthy and thorough discussion, GC decided to unanimously support the appointment. You will soon learn that Governing Council has sent a letter to this effect to the Honorable Judy Wasylycia-Leis. She is the Member of Parliament who raised this issue in the House of Commons. Dr. Prigent will soon appear before her and the Standing Committee of Health to answer questions and address any various concerns.

After careful deliberation, I have decided that I too will be a signatory on this letter. In the spirit of transparency, allow me to briefly share my rationale.

1. Governing Council members are appointed based on their individual skills and reputation, their expertise in health care research, health care organization, or administrative expertise, with a commitment to advancing the development of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians. In other words, GC members are not there to promote their own vested interests or those associated with their specific geographic, financial, disciplinary or pillar based affiliations. (I can also say, with complete and utter candour, I have never seen a member of GC attempt to do so). Rather, GC members are expected to place those personal agendas aside, and promote the best interests of CIHR, the broad research community and health related concerns of Canadians.
2. One part of the mandate of CIHR is to encourage innovation, by *facilitating the commercialization of health research in Canada and promoting economic development through health research in Canada*. Governing council has long recognized a gap in its membership, lacking someone with international experience in pharmaceutical innovations and experience. Dr. Prigent expertise will be invaluable with respect to CIHR's aspirations towards the enhancement of commercialization and economic development through health research in Canada.

3. Members of GC must observe the Conflict of Interest Act, the Ethical Guidelines for Public Office Holders and the Guidelines for the Political Activities of Public Office Holders as a condition of appointment.
4. Dr. Prigent has been a leader in the promotion of Research and Development within the Canadian Life Science Sector. These investments cover most aspects of pharmaceutical Research and Development, from discovery to clinical trials, as well as alliances with the biotech sector and partnerships with academic institutions, federal and provincial funding agencies. His expertise and unique, unbiased perspectives have earned him the respect and admiration of colleagues in Canada and abroad, both within the private and public health care sectors.
5. It has been argued that Dr. Prigent's appointment will undermine the independence of research at CIHR, and move us towards an agenda focused on commercialization and the interests of the private, for profit sector. However, the composition of the Governing Council includes researchers representing all four pillars, business experts, health care administrators—in essence, a group of individuals whose collective knowledge, wisdom and integrity, is designed to steer the course of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. As much as ever before, that course targets the entire mandate of CIHR, including, building research capacity in under-developed areas such as population health and health services research; training the next generation of health researchers; and focusing on knowledge translation, so that the results of research are transformed into policies, practices, procedures, products and services.

Some closing thoughts:

I am aware that the SCE is concerned that it will be seen not to have taken a stand on this important issue. The role of SCE is to make recommendations and offer advice to Governing Council. I would remind you that your discussion on this matter was minuted at our last meeting and that those minutes are part of the public record.

The SCE instructed me to make their concerns known. That, I can assure you, I have done to the best of my ability. As a result, everyone—including CIHR Senior Executive and the Governing Council—is aware of the issues and has discussed them thoroughly.

Finally, because of the concerns about Dr. Prigent's appointment, he will be appearing before the Standing Committee of Health. The SCE wanted the process examining and vetting this appointment to be transparent and public. If Dr. Prigent is able to address the concerns raised by the Honourable Judy Wasylycia-Leis, as I expect he will, then I think due process will have been served.

I hope I have been clear in outlining my reasons for signing the letter of support being sent by Governing Council. For those very reasons, I will not of course be signing the petition currently circulating in opposition to Dr. Prigent's appointment. Each of you, of course, are free to exercise your own judgement. That said, you now have the benefit of my thoughts on this matter.

Respectfully yours,

harvey

Harvey Max Chochinov OM MD PhD FRSC
Chair, Standing Committee on Ethics
Member, Governing Council