



February 17, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing you regarding Bill C-280, An Act to establish a National Strategy for Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency (CCSVI). Like many of you I have heard testimony of MS patients firsthand and sympathize with the pain and challenges they face every day. We all want Multiple Sclerosis (MS) patients to have access to the best treatment and to as much information as possible on how their situation can be improved.

Working closely with our partners, the Government is taking key action to help the many Canadians affected by MS; for example, we are creating a Canadian monitoring system that will gather and share new knowledge on the use of MS treatments across Canada and their long-term outcomes.

Regarding the procedure proposed by Dr. Zamboni, I understand fully the urgency MS patients and their families feel in having access to it here in Canada, now, and that this theory gives people hope. Ever since this procedure was proposed, medical colleges across Canada have advised provinces and territories to wait until sufficient scientific evidence exists before providing access to the treatment.

In House debates over C-280, you have heard that there is a direct link between CCSVI and MS and that the safety of the Zamboni procedure has already been established scientifically, however neither of these notions has been proven. While I share the hope of many that the procedure will prove to be effective in alleviating symptoms of so many Canadians suffering from MS, numerous international scientific committees and experts across the globe have stressed caution in this issue, as there is yet to be unequivocal scientific evidence that the Zamboni procedure is safe and effective.

You may also have heard in debates that the proposed venous angioplasty procedure is a routine procedure. In fact, the only commonly practiced balloon angioplasty done on veins is for patients undergoing regular dialysis treatments. The Alberta Health Services' opinion in this matter is clear: "there are no situations where venous angioplasty is an accepted and satisfactory treatment. [...] Therefore the claims that venous angioplasty is a *routinely done procedure* are *not* true."

.../2

The position of our Government has been clear on this from the outset – we would fund and launch a clinical trial once sufficient scientific evidence existed to warrant it. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is currently soliciting proposals for a Phase I/II trial to prove the Zamboni procedure is safe and effective. Supporters of Bill C-280 have called for a Phase III trial that includes a much larger number of patients; international experts are recommending a smaller trial first.

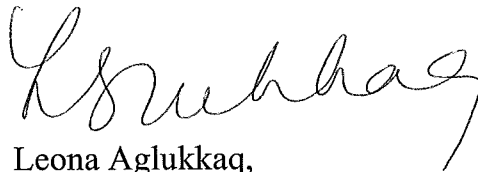
Bill C-280 calls for a legislative requirement that clinical tests on CCSVI be initiated. In other words, regardless of the best advice being offered by scientists around the world, this House would begin legislating medical research. Setting health research priorities through legislation would not be appropriate and it would jeopardize the independence of scientific decision making; not to mention setting a dangerous precedent.

Our approach is endorsed by the Canadian Medical Association (the national voluntary association of physicians that advocates for high-quality health care), the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, the Collège des médecins du Québec, and the Canadian Society of Vascular Surgery, as well as by other international medical bodies and scientific panels.

We cannot and must not turn a blind-eye to international experts' opinions. However difficult the decision is, as parliamentarians, we have an ethical obligation to put patients' safety first. Our evidence-based healthcare system requires that procedures performed be sound and shown to work. We have built this system on exacting, internationally recognized, ethical and scientific standards – circumventing them through legislation is undermining the independence of our scientific process and the safety of our fellow Canadians.

I respectfully ask that you carefully consider this before voting on C-280.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leona Aglukkaq', written in a cursive style.

Leona Aglukkaq,