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4 former patients of Ottawa doctor have hepatitis C

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Four former patients of Dr. Christiane Farazli have tested positive for hepatitis C, according to the law firm leading a class-action lawsuit against the embattled Ottawa doctor.

The patients contacted Merchant Law Group after receiving their test results, said Nicholas Robinson, a Saskatchewan-based lawyer for the firm.

"They're extremely distraught," he said, adding that three of the four were recently tested. "We were saddened about the way that this affects their lives and the lives of people who are close to them."

Carlos Martinez Sr., 57, started seeing Farazli in September 2002 after his family doctor made a referral for liver tests, according to his son, Carlos Martinez Jr. Farazli performed two endoscopies on Martinez Sr. over several weeks. In December of the same year, he was diagnosed with hepatitis C.

"That was a real shock," Martinez Jr. said from his home in Burlington, Ont. Martinez Sr. was unavailable for comment, as he is volunteering in Bolivia with the Canadian International Development Agency.

Martinez Sr. was sent back to Farazli for his hepatitis C treatment, but decided to switch to another doctor after she told him, "You're going to die," according to Martinez Jr.

"We ended up saying that it was a language issue just to get out of it," he said. "But we just didn't want to be with somebody who thought he wasn't going to make it."

When the family requested a transfer, Farazli reacted angrily.

"She was raising her voice, very rude, questioning my dad why," Martinez Jr. said.

Farazli told the family that Martinez Sr. likely had hepatitis C for 20 years before immigrating to Canada in 1993 from Venezuela, saying it was "common that it would happen in a clinic over there," Martinez Jr. said.

Last month, Ottawa Public Health issued 6,800 letters to Farazli's former patients, warning they may have been exposed to hepatitis C, hepatitis B or HIV after being treated by the doctor.

Health officials and the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons found that Farazli had lax procedures for disinfecting gastroscopy and colonoscopy equipment over a nine-year period from April 2002 to June 2011.

Martinez Sr. was shocked to receive the letter, his son said. "My dad said it was kind of like a joke . . . because he was infected."

Robinson cautioned against making assumptions.

"I emphasize that we make no conclusions as to where they go the illness," he said. "Hepatitis C can be contracted from all sorts of sources."

"That's something for the court to decide."

Michael Fitzpatrick, spokesperson for the City of Ottawa, said it would be "premature" to comment since it is unclear how these four people contracted hepatitis C.



Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Isra Levy makes an announcement on Oct. 17 saying Ottawa Public Health had sent warning letters to 6,800 patients who may have been exposed to hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV from a clinic run by Dr. Christiane Farazli.

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