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**By Sue Bailey**

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Whistle-blower's fight for compensation latest skirmish with public service  
BY SUE BAILEY

OTTAWA (CP) - Shiv Chopra is not your typical Fat City bureaucrat. He has breached gag orders, fought suspensions and vexed his Health Canada bosses in a self-described quest to protect public safety. To some, he's a hero. To others, a relentless communications headache who should show the loyalty owed by faithful government workers.

Chopra, a microbiologist and drug evaluator in the federal veterinary drugs bureau, goes before a public service tribunal Tuesday. He's fighting to recoup about \$4,000 in salary lost during a five-day suspension in April 2002.

He was penalized for publicly criticizing, the previous fall, Health Canada's plans to stockpile antibiotics in case of a bioterrorist attack.

Chopra, 69, dismayed his supervisors by telling reporters that the fear of biological agents such as anthrax was greatly exaggerated. Such organisms cannot spread en masse, he stressed, adding there was no need to hoard medicines.

"Stockpiling of antibiotics only looks good for the minister of health to say: 'We're prepared,' " Chopra said at the time. "I think it's just media hype and unnecessarily scaring people."

He was penalized for "interfering with government policy," Chopra said in a recent interview. But he insists he did nothing wrong.

"Just because I work at Health Canada doesn't mean I'm not a citizen of the country. I've broken no rules.

"I do have the right, in a democratic country called Canada, to make comments."

It's the latest in Chopra's long string of skirmishes with a federal bureaucracy known for rigid controls.

In 1998, he and another Health Canada scientist, Margaret Haydon, accused the department of pressuring them to approve drugs without adequate safety assurances from manufacturers.

They were reprimanded for going public, but were vindicated by the Federal Court of Canada. It said traditional expectations of employee loyalty are outweighed by the public interest.

In 2001, Chopra and Haydon said they were being pressed to approve a drug for use in cows and chickens that could produce antibiotic resistance in humans. The department denied it.

And earlier this spring, after a single case of mad cow disease was discovered in an Alberta cow, Chopra and several other Health Canada scientists said related warnings were ignored.

They said their calls for a complete ban on cattle by-products in pig and chicken feed were never acted on. They are still concerned that the feed could accidentally be given to cows, increasing the risk of a mad-cow outbreak, Chopra said.

"Now we can't talk to anyone, we can't easily access files and we all report directly to the director general," he said of the latest fall-out.

Jirina Vlk, a spokeswoman for Health Canada, would not discuss Chopra specifically.

But the department enforces communication rules "to ensure conclusions are based on the best assessment," she said.

"An appropriate balance has to be sought between freedom of expression and the need to maintain an effective and impartial public service."

Mike McBane, spokesman for the non-partisan Canadian Health Coalition, says Canadians should thank whistle-blowers like Chopra.

"They have a duty to uphold the law, and a duty to speak out. And that duty takes precedence over their loyalty to their employers.

"What this illustrates is that the food and drug regulator at Health Canada has to shroud its decisions in secrecy in order to get away with approving unsafe products and to falsely reassure the public that they're protecting our health and safety."

Chopra concedes it would be easier to enjoy his golden years in his garden, writing poetry or doing race-relations work - his other great passions.

But he traces his tenacity to childhood.

"I grew up in India when Mahatma Gandhi was the leader and the father of the nation.

"I'm a Hindu by birth, and fighting corruption is the principle of existence," he says. "When corruption rises, you must fight . . . even at the cost of your life."

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Ottawa Sun (September 29, 2003)

FED WHISTLEBLOWER DEMANDS LOST PAY 'I DO HAVE THE RIGHT ... TO MAKE COMMENTS'

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To some, he's a hero. To others, a relentless communications headache who should show the loyalty owed to faithful government workers.

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He was penalized for publicly criticizing, the previous fall, Health Canada's plans to stockpile antibiotics in case of a bioterrorist attack.

Chopra, 69, dismayed his supervisors by telling reporters that the fear of biological agents, such as anthrax, was greatly exaggerated.

He said that such organisms cannot spread en masse, adding there was no need to hoard medicines: "Stockpiling of antibiotics only looks good for the minister of health to say: 'We're prepared.' I think it's just media hype and unnecessarily scaring people."

Chopra said he was penalized for "interfering with government policy," but insists he did nothing wrong.

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## MAD COW WARNING

And last spring, after a case of mad cow disease was discovered, Chopra and other Health Canada scientists said related warnings were ignored. They said their calls for a ban on cattle byproducts in pig and chicken feed were never acted on.

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But she said the department enforces communication rules "to ensure conclusions are based on the best assessment."

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The Vancouver Province (September 29, 2003)  
Civil servant gets hearing

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Such organisms cannot spread en masse, he stressed, adding there was no need to hoard medicines.

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Le Droit (September 29, 2003)

Dénonciateur devant un tribunal de la fonction publique

Shiv Chopra n'est pas un fonctionnaire typique. Il a enfreint à plusieurs reprises la consigne du secret, combattu des suspensions et contrarié ses patrons, au ministère fédéral de la Santé, dans ce qu'il décrit comme une croisade pour protéger la sécurité publique. Microbiologiste et évaluateur de médicaments au Bureau fédéral des drogues vétérinaires, il comparaitra demain devant un tribunal de la fonction publique. Il cherche à récupérer environ 4000 \$ en salaire perdu à la suite d'une suspension de cinq jours, en avril 2002, pour avoir critiqué, l'automne précédent, le projet de Santé Canada d'accumuler des antibiotiques en cas d'attaque bioterroriste.

M. Chopra, qui est âgé de 69 ans, avait dit aux journalistes que la crainte d'attaques biologiques à partir d'anthrax avait été grandement exagérée, de tels organismes biologiques ne pouvant se répandre massivement. Selon lui, il n'était nullement nécessaire de faire d'immenses provisions de médicaments.

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Puni pour " entrave à la politique gouvernementale ", M. Chopra soutient n'avoir rien fait de mal.

M. Chopra a déjà eu maille à partir avec la fonction publique fédérale. En 1998, c'est lui qui, avec une autre scientifique, Margaret Haydon, avait accusé le ministère de faire pression sur eux pour qu'ils approuvent des médicaments sans assurance adéquate de sécurité de la part des manufacturiers.

En 2001, ces deux mêmes scientifiques avaient affirmé avoir fait l'objet de pressions pour qu'ils approuvent un médicament destiné aux vaches et aux poulets, susceptible d'engendrer une résistance aux antibiotiques chez l'humain.

Vache folle

Ce printemps, après qu'un cas de maladie de la vache folle eut été découvert en Alberta, M. Chopra et plusieurs autres scientifiques de son ministère ont déploré qu'on n'ait pas tenu compte de leurs mises en garde et de leur demande d'une interdiction complète des farines animales dans les aliments fournis aux cochons et aux poulets.

Ils craignent que ces aliments ne puissent être accidentellement donnés à des vaches, ce qui accroîtrait le risque d'autres cas de " vache folle ".

Jirina Vlk, porte-parole de Santé Canada, n'a pas voulu commenter le cas précis de M. Chopra. Mais elle a souligné que le ministère vise " l'équilibre entre la liberté d'expression et le besoin de maintenir une fonction publique efficace et impartiale ".

Mike McBane, porte-parole de la Coalition canadienne de la santé, un organisme non partisan, croit que les Canadiens devraient plutôt remercier des dénonciateurs comme M. Chopra.

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PUBLIC INTEREST IS FIRST

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