

# Porter's ties to SNC go back further than previously thought

BY AARON DERFEL, THE MONTREAL GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 9, 2014

Arthur Porter, who is accused of orchestrating a \$22.5-million fraud against the McGill University Health Centre, acknowledges in a new tell-all memoir that during the bidding process for the MUHC superhospital contract he was being wooed by one of the bidders, SNC-Lavalin, to work as a lobbyist on international contracts.

Porter says that his work for the engineering firm was to begin only after the \$1.3-billion superhospital construction contract was awarded. He doesn't acknowledge his cosy relationship with SNC-Lavalin during the bidding process might already have constituted a conflict of interest.

"SNC-Lavalin had asked me to work for (its international) division in 2005, shortly after my arrival in Canada," Porter writes in his book, *The Man Behind the Bow Tie: Arthur Porter On Business, Politics and Intrigue*. The Gazette obtained an advance copy on Monday.

The revelation is significant because it suggests that Porter's ties with SNC-Lavalin date farther back than the prosecution's case, which alleges that the kickback scheme was first hatched only in 2008. The timeline is critical: the provincial government kicked off the bidding process for the superhospital in 2007 between two competing consortia, one of which was headed by SNC-Lavalin. At that early point, according to the book, Porter had already been in talks for two years with the CEO of SNC-Lavalin, Pierre Duhaime, about an eventual job to drum up international business for the Quebec-based conglomerate.

"I was very interested" in the lobbying consultancy for SNC-Lavalin, Porter writes. "I knew that Montreal would be my last stint as a hospital administrator. The day-to-day running of the mega-hospital was going to be much less exciting than getting it built, and I had quickly begun to cultivate the next phase of my career in international business.

"And I liked Pierre Duhaime very much. He was a funny, flashy and aggressive executive," Porter adds.

Until now, Porter has never declared publicly that SNC-Lavalin was courting him during the bidding process, although The Gazette has previously reported on the existence of an internal memo by the MUHC touting possible joint ventures with the engineering firm in Kuwait and other countries. That internal memo was produced while Porter was at the helm of the MUHC.

Ultimately, Duhaime, along with Porter, would face charges as part of an eight-person conspiracy to defraud the deficit-ridden public hospital network.

“We drafted legal documents on the terms of my consultancy, effective once the bidding process had ended,” Porter writes about his relationship with SNC-Lavalin. “In the meantime, I offered to do some informal, unpaid work on their behalf.”

Porter points out that the final decision to award the contract was made by Normand Bergeron, CEO of Infrastructure Québec; Clermont Gignac, in charge of the modernization of Quebec hospitals; and himself in a sealed-off room in the presence of an auditor and Quebec’s ethics commissioner.

Ironically, a book that Porter has written as part of a campaign to assert his innocence could provide the prosecution with some added context in its case against him.

Porter, however, denies that he accepted \$22.5 million in bribes to secure the contract for SNC-Lavalin, suggesting that he is the victim of a “witch hunt” because he was an outsider who succeeded in getting an English-language hospital built in Quebec.

Porter and his wife, Pamela Mattock, were arrested by Interpol agents on May 26, 2013, while travelling to Panama. In the book, he states that he was en route to Antigua and Barbuda, with a “diplomatic passport” from his native Sierra Leone, to set up a cancer clinic. But one of the big unanswered questions in the book is why Porter would choose to fly first from his home in the Bahamas to Panama, hundreds of kilometres to the west, rather than straight to Antigua and Barbuda, already located in the Caribbean.

Porter says he’s sharing a prison cell in La Joya with a Hells Angel from Quebec and a drug lord from the United Kingdom. Because of his outside reputation and his status as a physician, Porter says he has succeeded in running a pawn business in jail and has the benefits of a cook named Julio and an inmate, called “The Mexican,” who teaches him Spanish. He also has acquired what he refers to in jest as a “summer home” in jail, a rooftop spot where he can breathe fresh air and enjoy the view.