Research Aims:

Community partners in the Concertation Interquartier have identified a 24-hour pharmacy as a needed service at the MUHC mega hospital. 24-hour pharmacies could help patients who are seen and released at off-hours, as for example occurs with emergency room services, and provide convenient ‘one-stop’ medical support on the hospital site. Such a facility also holds out a potential for extensive integration of pharmacists in the delivery of healthcare. Pharmacists’ input into drug use management is integral to ensuring appropriate dosages, averting hazardous interactions and allergies, and providing valid, up-to-date information to support patient health. On-site facilities, day and night, could provide for better integration with MUHC services. Pharmacists may also ease the burden on emergency rooms by providing advice on minor ailments and injuries for people who may not need to go to emergency but who require late night services.

This research examined implications of offering 24-hour services at a pharmacy. Research was conducted to: evaluate the current situation of 24-hour pharmacies in Montreal; determine opportunities and constraints associated with 24 hour service; and examine potential business models for providing such a service within the MUHC Glen Campus’ commercial mall. The research entailed interviews with key informants knowledgeable about the operations of the two 24-hour pharmacies in the Montreal region.

Key results:

There currently are two 24-hour pharmacies in the Montreal region. One is located in Côte-des-Neiges in the western part of the city; the second is located off-island in the area of Greenfield Park. The Côte-des-Neiges pharmacy is located approximately 4.5 kilometres away from the Glen Campus and is about a ten minute drive by private automobile, or a twenty minute ride by metro and bus (although the metro is closed during night time hours). The Greenfield Park pharmacy is located approximately 16 kilometres away across the Champlain Bridge and is not as well serviced by public transportation. As seen on the map, these two pharmacies are located in some of the most densely populated parts of the Montreal region; eastern Montreal has no nearby 24-hour pharmacy.

The pharmacies cater to those who require pharmaceutical services between 12:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. and on holidays. All services and products (except the Canada Post counter) are available at all hours. The ‘catchment area’ for each pharmacy increases during holidays and on off-hours. On statutory
holidays, for example, clients come from the entirety of the Montreal area, including as far away as Saint-Jérôme, Joliette and Sainte-Hyacinthe.

The research also points to constraints and benefits associated with operating a 24 hour service in the Montreal area:

**Benefits:**
- services are made available to clientele, including those released from hospital at off-hours
- revenues increase during off hours and holidays due to increased demand
- revenues from non-pharmacy products increase during off-hours due to increased customer volumes

**Constraints:**
- costs of operating during off hours can be high, at times exceeding revenues
- costs to remain open on holidays are high, largely due to the increased cost of employees due to holiday pay and the need for additional employees because of increased demand
- barriers to entry may exist, principally the availability of a pharmacist to cover off-hours and the stocking of provincially-specified levels of pharmaceuticals

These findings suggest that a 24-hour business model may not be appropriate for all pharmacies. Both examples of 24-hour pharmacies in the Montreal area are franchises of large pharmacy chains. Large companies, such as Pharmaprix (Shoppers Drug Mart) or Jean Coutu, may be more capable of adopting a 24-hour business model than smaller independent pharmacies due to the size of their operations. Those interviewed suggested that these franchises may benefit from greater financial robustness because of the volume of their sales and the wide range of products carried, which allow them to cover any losses incurred by offering a 24-hour service. They also may already have numerous pharmacists on staff. No research was conducted with smaller or independent pharmacies to provide insight into such hypotheses.

**Steps Forward:**

The MUHC has allocated five hundred square meters in the Glen yards site commercial mall for a pharmacy (by comparison, a typical Starbucks café is between 140 and 160 square meters). Community members have called for a 24-hour pharmacy. Availability of medications and medical products off-hours is considered most vital, yet offering a wide array of products would be very convenient for employees who arrive or leave the hospital at times when most other services are closed. A market study should be done to determine which services should be offered on a 24-hour basis: all services and products, only the pharmaceutical counter, or another specific mix of services. The MUHC could also benefit from the integration of a team of pharmacists into its delivery of care, and from the message conveyed to the wider community, patients and employees that their health care and other needs have been prioritised.