

Health decision undemocratic

http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/opinion/letters/96106404.html

Comox Valley Record

Published: June 10, 2010 6:00 PM

Dear editor,

What distortion of democracy is this?

The Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), unelected and unrepresentative, and St. Joseph's CEO Michael Pontus and his board of administrators, unelected and unrepresentative, have decided to deal with a funding shortfall for our community hospital by laying off registered nurses and closing 18 acute-care beds.

St. Joseph's is a taxpayer-funded hospital serving a growing community with a high proportion of seniors; it is a hospital which almost daily has problems finding sufficient qualified nursing staff to work.

VIHA says decisions on how to spend funding belong to St Joseph's. Mr. Pontus has yet to make a public appearance where he could explain and answer questions. Where is the accountability?

VIHA has little interest in what happens to our hospital as long as the bottom line is met. How can they make sense of closing beds now, while planning a new hospital with more beds to take its place, except that they don't give a damn about our present one which is non-VIHA, but only care about the new one, which will be directly under their control? The hospital administration, meanwhile, has forbidden staff to wear discreet buttons that read "Save the beds, save the nurses, save the care," even sending home a staff member who refused to remove a button.

Who is advocating for our community's right to quality health care?

To pick one day last week, no staff could be found, even at overtime rates, to staff Overflow Unit 1, where admitted patients are 'held' until there are beds for them to go to. Overflow Unit 2 was full with seven patients and there were eight admitted patients being held in ER, a total of 15 patients for whom there were no beds available in the acute-care units.

If a few more patients had required emergency services, they would soon have been redirected to Nanaimo or Campbell River, each of which has their own bed capacity and staffing problems.

The uncertainty and promises of imminent layoffs have caused RNs to start leaving the hospital to look for work elsewhere. In a reversal of policy, for reasons of expediency, licensed practical nurses are being assigned to unfamiliar areas, without orientation; and duties normally assigned to RNs are being assigned to LPNs. It is a very dangerous game Mr. Pontus is playing.

What we really need are more long-term care beds in the community. Elderly patients waiting for these beds could then be moved out from the hospital, freeing up much-needed acute-care beds. By turning the second floor at the hospital into a 'transitional unit' for those awaiting long-term care, instead of advocating for community care for them, Mr. Pontus is helping to 'manufacture' a shortage of acute-care beds.

Sooner rather than later, this will come to be seen as a 'crisis' in the hospital system, smoothing the way towards private facilities and private insurance.

Is this what we want? The public has a right to question Mr. Pontus as he acts on our behalf and it is time he came out from behind the curtain and discussed the issue with us face to face. Just like in a democracy.

When will it be, Mr. Pontus?

Name withheld

MLA presenting petition of above 8,000 names

http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/news/95581059.html

Comox Valley Record

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More than 8,000 Vancouver Island citizens have signed the St. Joseph's Health Coalition petition opposing a planned 22-per-cent cut of medical and surgical beds at St. Joseph's General Hospital.

Comox Valley MLA Don McRae was to present that petition to the B.C. legislature this week, the coalition said in a news release. The coalition plans to continue collecting signatures through the summer.

The administration of St. Joseph's announced March 30 that it planned to cut 22 per cent of the hospital's medical and surgical beds and create a 26-bed transition unit.

The new transition unit will not be staffed to care for acutely ill patients, and the result will be emergency room overcrowding, cancelled surgeries and less ability to care for very sick senior citizens, claimed the coalition. "Comox Valley citizens have not been fooled into believing that 22-per-cent cut of medical/surgical beds is somehow good for them," said Juanita Munroe, a registered nurse and coalition member. "The huge response to our petition shows the public clearly understands that cutting almost a quarter of the hospital's medical/surgical beds will erode the Comox Valley's health care. And hospital administration's public relations efforts have not convinced them otherwise."

Courtenay lawyer and federal Liberal Party candidate Mike Holland has produced research on Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) funding patterns back to 2003 and has demonstrated that northern Vancouver Island receives 50 per cent less health care funding per person than Victoria, according to the coalition's news release.

This means VIHA's unequal formula costs the North Island about \$36 million a year in lost health care funding, the coalition calculated.

St. Joseph's is cutting 22 per cent of medical/surgical beds to save more than \$1 million. With fair funding from VIHA, those services could stay in the Comox Valley, the coalition alleged.

To learn more about the impact of the medical/surgical bed cuts, visit www.stjosephshealthcoalition.ca.
— St. Joseph's Health Coalition

How many patients convalescing?

http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/opinion/letters/95073624.html

Comox Valley Record

Published: May 27, 2010 6:00 PM

Dear editor,

I'm writing to express my concern about the planned cuts to RN staffing and acute care at St. Joseph's Hospital.

It appears that VIHA has produced no evidence of a need for 18 more transitional care beds in exchange for a loss of acute-care beds.

My understanding is that Fraser Health has estimated that the hospital population in its area is approximately 10 per cent convalescing prior to going home. Convalescent beds are now "user pay" (a minimum of \$29.40 per day and based on income).

There is no evidence that 10 per cent of the hospital patients on Vancouver Island or in St. Joseph's are convalescing. It appears the government is planning to erode medicare even further, by bringing "user pay" beds into our hospitals.

Many Canadians do not have health insurance. If hospital stays are charged to them, they will "choose" to go home, even if they do not have the supports in place for their health and safety.

We need to support, not gut, medicare. We need to support our poorer citizens and avoid the trend towards user fees.
Jennifer Pass, Courtenay

Two hospitals needed

http://www.bcclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/opinion/letters/94865744.html

Published: May 25, 2010 3:00 PM

Dear editor,

Having been a guest in our Campbell River Hospital, and just arriving home after a week, gave me very good insight into how wonderful it is to have a fully functioning acute-care hospital in our community.

My sincere thanks and gratitude goes to Drs. Minnaar, Douglas and Leonard for the excellent care I received from them. It is obvious how starved of finances our hospital is when you look at the building, equipment, or lack thereof, and condition of bedding, towels, curtains, etc. Despite the continuing decay and neglect of our Campbell River Hospital, the nursing and other staff are exemplary in their patience, caring and pleasant demeanor with all the patients in spite of any situation.

It certainly reinforces the fact that we badly need both St. Joseph's and Campbell River hospitals, as well as all other present medical facilities for the North Island. Any erosion of services impacts the rest. It is unacceptable that there should be any reduction of acute care beds at St. Joseph's.

We must protect the health services we have and not allow VIHA and the government to reduce or take any of those acute care beds or services away. The Comox Valley community is galvanized to protect what they have at St. Joseph's. The North Island hospital services have been chronically underfunded for a very long time compared to the southern part of Vancouver Island. This needs to change! There should be national standards for wait times for surgeries. It is not acceptable to wait so long that the patients further deteriorate before they can get badly needed surgeries.

If we all remain committed to unite against these cuts in our health care services, it is more difficult for VIHA and the government to implement them.

It is not too late to sign the petition against the cuts of nurses and acute care beds at St. Joseph's.

Please phone Barb at 250-338-4067 or Lois at 250-287-3096 to obtain a petition. You may also sign the petition at MLA Claire Trevena's office in Campbell River.

Some of the Campbell River doctors sent a letter to the Comox Valley Record newspaper in support of the CV medical community and against the cuts to acute care beds and loss of nurses and other staff. MLAs Claire Trevena (North Island) and Scott Fraser (Alberni-Pacific Rim) have written to Health Minister Kevin Falcon protesting the cuts. This is what it takes on a vigilant and continual basis to avoid losing health services and staff.

The fight for our new hospitals and to retain all our present services is far from over.

Our doctors, nurses and all the other hospitals' staff should not have to spend their valuable and busy time fighting for all of us to keep our health care services.

The onus is on each and every one of us to back them and do our part.

Lois Jarvis,

Campbell River

Coalition pleads for health care

http://www.bcclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/news/94865164.html

Comox Valley Record

Published: May 25, 2010 3:00 PM

The St. Joseph's Health Coalition spoke to the Vancouver Island Health Authority last week, requesting that the health authority provide funding to maintain acute-care services at St. Joseph's General Hospital and increase investments in residential care to keep seniors out of acute-care beds.

Jennifer Pass made a presentation to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) board of directors May 19 on behalf of St. Joseph's Health Coalition, raising the concerns the community has expressed about the planned changes and creation of a transitional unit at St. Joseph's.

The conversion of the second floor of the hospital, currently a 24-bed surgical unit, to a transitional unit and the layoff of about 15 registered nurses due to a change in the staffing mix, means the loss of 18 acute-care beds, although St. Joseph's president and CEO Michael Pontus insists acute care beds will not be lost, Pass told the VIHA board.

"These beds will not be functional acute-care beds because the staffing, environment and the entire organization of care will be inappropriate for acute patients," she said. "This actual reduction in acute-care beds (regardless of how it is spun) is a violation of VIHA's commitment to maintain the current level of acute-care services for the North Island until new hospitals are built."

Pass told the VIHA board that St. Joseph's is experiencing a shortage of acute-care beds on a daily basis.

"Now, besides the cramped 'overflow' area adjacent the emergency department, which has six stretchers, a seven-bed area that was previously pediatrics has been hastily opened even before the basic supplies such as medicines, basic equipment and telephone and fax were in place," she said.

"Given this situation, it defies logic to suggest that the removal of 18 acute-care beds from service for acute care patients and the layoff of nurses represents an improvement in care," she added.

To date, more than 7,600 people have signed a petition calling for no reduction to the services or acute-care beds at St. Joseph's, calling on VIHA to provide adequate funding for residential care to alleviate the pressure on acute care beds at St. Joseph's and calling for support for the medical staff, nurses and entire hospital staff.

Level of health care will deteriorate

http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/comoxvalleyrecord/opinion/letters/93735519.html

Published: **May 13, 2010 6:00 PM**

Dear editor,

The saga of the present trials of St. Joseph's General Hospital has been told before.

The Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) asked the hospital administration to cut \$1.3 million from its budget. The administration responded by planning to cut the number of acute-care beds from 59 to 41, concentrating all these remaining beds on the third floor and changing the second floor into a long-term care facility with 26 beds attended only by LPNs and care aides.

The plan includes laying off 15 to 20 nurses. To make all this more palatable to the public, fancy terms were introduced, such as "restructuring, transitional beds, changing needs and new ways of doing things."

Why do you think doctors rejected these plans three times in their meetings? Do you think they were eager for confrontation with the administration, hospital board and VIHA, or not educated enough to get the fine points of this grandiose scheme?

The answer is simple. Doctors many not have a degree in administration, but they can do the math, and they figured out very quickly that, with any reduced numbers of acute-care beds and nurses, it will be impossible to maintain the level of care for acutely ill patients and cope with any unexpected disasters or epidemics.

Even at the present time, there are patients lying in the corridors and in the so-called "overflow unit" in our emergency department.

Citizens of the Comox Valley expect the hospital administration and hospital board to protect the quality of acute care in our hospital and say no to any budgetary cuts from VIHA.

Make no mistake, unless these plans are stopped now, they will be pushed through after July 28.

Dr. J.J. Simice, Comox