

## **In Depth - Whose hospital is it, anyway?**

By [Contributed Opinion - Gulf Islands Driftwood](#) Published: April 20, 2011 10:00 AM  
By RAY PHILLIPS

Based on a review of available facts, opposition to the restoration of general surgical services at Lady Minto takes on a surreal quality. Has the world gone completely mad? Imagine a total stranger visiting our island, picking up the Jan. 19, 2011 issue of the Driftwood and reading an open letter signed by 14 or 15 doctors endorsing the permanent closure of the operating room at Lady Minto Hospital. Would s/he conclude the island's doctors had taken leave of their senses; they very well might! In a Feb. 9, 2011 article, Dr. Shane Barclay, chief of medical staff at Lady Minto Hospital, stated that the doctors based their decision on the "artfully" prepared 2010 VIHA Salt Spring Island Health Review. A closer examination of some of the known facts should shed some light on the fallacy of the doctors' decision.

In 2009, a review was initiated by VIHA; a direct result of the SOS Committee's visit to MLA Murray Coell's office that was intended to silence the objections of SOS through justifying the closure of the OR. Under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, SOS obtained an email sent by Bill Relph, administrator of Lady Minto Hospital, to a staffer Shannon Marshall, stating that he wished the SOS Committee would "just float" away because it was "not the direction we want to go in" with respect to reopening the surgery. That email was dated after the visit to Coell's office but before the review was even started. That document contained misstatements such as the former general surgeon resigning when the fact was he was forced to resign or be fired.

The review was based on a blatant misuse of statistics and incorrect information, such as quoting the statistic that the number of OR procedures performed in a half year as though it was a full year; stating that VIHA could not find a replacement for the previous general surgeon — some surgeons expressed interest but soon withdrew as they learned VIHA was only offering two half days a week.

VIHA had the audacity to state under-utilization of the OR as a reason for its closure after the expenditure of almost \$3 million. The under-utilization was a direct result of VIHA's underfunding.

Now further information supporting restoring the surgery at LMH has come to light. On June 22-23, 2007, the Invitational Meeting on Rural Surgical Services was held in Vancouver recommending the sustaining of general surgical facilities in rural communities such as ours. One of the stakeholders identified was VIHA and one of the presenters was LMH administrator Bill Relph, supporting continuance of general surgeries in rural communities and commenting on the isolation issue by noting Salt Spring is "separated from tertiary care by a body of water not serviced by ferries after 2100h." Have Relph and the VIHA people since drunk from the waters of the Lethe, river of forgetfulness?

Why do some people or groups oppose reopening our surgery, particularly in view of recent tragic events in Japan? VIHA is obviously pursuing a policy of centralization in the big population centers to the detriment of rural communities like ours, which explains their opposition to reopening the OR. Perhaps some doctors signed that letter to avoid conflict. Most people will do almost anything to avoid confrontation, particularly with those in authority. That conflict even involved placing "gag" orders on the nursing staff to not discuss that closing. If the reason for signing that letter is conflict avoidance, loss of our surgery is too high a price to pay for your peace of mind.

The LMH Foundation board opposes the reopening because they have chosen to align themselves with policies of VIHA. If the doctors feared that not signing that letter threatened the loss of hospital privileges, then I suggest that such fears are unfounded. VIHA would not dare to remove hospital privileges for 14 or 15 doctors. If their reason for supporting the permanent closure of the OR is, as Dr. Barclay states, based on that fictional document, the Salt Spring Island Health Review, all that is needed is to examine the facts for themselves, available on our website [info@sos.ca](mailto:info@sos.ca). After informing themselves, if they still want to stay aboard the leaky vessel that is the review, I hope they are all wearing flotation gear.

Whose hospital is it, anyway? Lady Minto Hospital is not owned by the Ministry of Health, VIHA, Barclay, Relph, the foundation board or the doctors. It is owned by the residents of Salt Spring and the other Southern Gulf Islands.

Your SOS Committee speaks for the vast majority of the residents of Salt Spring. We demand that surgical services be restored as soon as is humanly possible. We assure our supporters that we will not abandon the cause no matter how long it takes.

Be informed. Visit our website [info@sos.ca](mailto:info@sos.ca). The writer is a member of the SOS committee.

[http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver\\_island\\_south/saltspringislanddriftwood/opinion/120285289.html](http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_south/saltspringislanddriftwood/opinion/120285289.html)