

Viewpoint - What does LMH mean to you? - Published: January 05, 2011 10:00 AM - By ROSEMARY TRUMP

I want to thank Victoria Woodman for her excellent letter regarding the cancellation of surgical services at Lady Minto Hospital. ("Operating room," Dec. 15 Driftwood.)

The SOS (Save Our Surgery) group has been working hard on behalf of the community to have this service reinstated, and I must confess that until recently I have been content to let them fight this battle for me. After all, we live on an island and are vulnerable here, so common sense would dictate that an emergency department would require supporting surgical services. Surely a gentle reminder from SOS would help sort out this problem in no time.

Wrong! Not only is surgery still cancelled at Lady Minto Hospital, but the \$3-million modern surgical facility opened in 2005 is in jeopardy of being dismantled and given piecemeal to other hospitals. Our surgery will be gone and a huge community investment will be lost to us.

At this time if your appendix inflames or bursts in the middle of the night, it can't be fixed here. If a mother-to-be has birthing complications, there will be no caesarean available on Salt Spring. If someone you love has a twisted bowel in the middle of the night, no one will operate. An emergency, by definition is something we cannot plan for, and it is not always possible to get off the island when we need to because we are vulnerable to available transportation and the vagaries of weather.

We have good doctors here. Sadly, recently, several doctors have left the island; another is rumoured to be leaving soon. I want my doctor to stay, and I hope more doctors will come here so that no islander is without a family physician. How can we put our health in their hands, expect them to care for us, and at the same time remove a service so essential to their work?

Surgery has been called the heart of a hospital. It is a core service that places high standards of professional delivery on all medical staff. Such demands keep staff excited and interested, and will attract newly trained professionals who seek to live here and serve our community with skill and enthusiasm.

A growing and secure community depends on its safety nets: fire department, police and medical care. Each level is interdependent on the other for ultimate success. If our population can be expected to endure or expand, all hospital services must be available to seniors and young families.

We are fortunate to have an amazing emergency department. I know from recent personal experience just how competent and professional it is. Short of surgery, it does the very best it can for any patient needing care. Restoring the availability of surgery will allow it to do all it can.

The next time you travel along Lower Ganges Road, look at the green sign with the big white H, and ask yourself what it means to you. A hospital is not just a lifeless mass of bricks and mortar. Much more, it is the people and services working within: the doctors, nurses, technicians, cooks, service providers, the lab, x-ray, extended care, emergency and other departments all beating a life force into our hospital. Each one is vital to the health of the whole.

VIHA's corporate scalpel has slashed at its core, eviscerating our surgery and threatening the well being of the hospital and the safety of our community. There is no patch; expanding current services will not make it whole. A private clinic will not fill the gap.

Look at that big H and think not of what is there, but of what has been lost. Even worse, think about what could be next.

The writer teaches fitness to island seniors.

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