

## Saltspring residents determined to keep surgery open

By Richard Watts, Times Colonist June 10, 2010 6:12 AM

Saltspring residents determined to see surgery continue at Lady Minto Hospital are mobilizing service clubs and other community groups.

Saltspring resident Phyllis Bolton, chairwoman of a group calling itself SOS for Save Our Surgery, said she and others are planning to approach the Lions Club, Rotary Club, Lady Minto Hospital Auxiliary and other organizations on Saltspring for support in keeping the operating room open.

"We will certainly be soliciting members of the community and getting as much support as we possibly can," said Bolton.

She and others say closing the operating room will diminish the level of medical expertise at Lady Minto, turning it into little more than a nursing home, and forcing Gulf Island residents to go to hospitals in Victoria or Vancouver, removing them from family and support.

The Vancouver Island Health Authority is recommending the permanent closure of the operating room at Lady Minto Hospital in Ganges. Only minor operations such as endoscopies would continue. A community meeting has been planned for later this month to gauge public opinion.

A recent report by the health authority concluded too few operations are performed at the hospital to make for a viable surgical practice. The report also says efforts to attract a surgeon to Saltspring have proven unsuccessful. The last surgeon retired in 2008.

But that surgeon, Dr. Roy Preshaw, said he was forced out and has launched an appeal to learn exactly why and perhaps pursue court action.

Preshaw, now 73, said in a telephone interview from Saltspring that when he arrived in 2002, he was led to believe Lady Minto would anchor health care for the population of all the southern Gulf Islands, estimated at 15,600 in the latest report.

Noting that the population grows significantly during summer, Preshaw said the Southern Gulf Islands can support a general surgeon. He said 20,000 is generally considered enough population to support a general surgical practice.

"It's not going to be a super-sexy practice, but you are going to get someone who is interested in coming to that," he said.

But it would work "only if you get a system whereby Lady Minto Hospital forms the basis of health care on the Southern Gulf Islands," said Preshaw.

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