

Viewpoint - Don't let go of OR issue, says SOS

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Will 2011 go down as the year Salt Springers had their say? Will this be the year that, yes, the community at large has something to say and this time someone is listening?

We know that islanders continue to wonder what happened to the tax dollars spent for surgical services on Salt Spring. We know that islanders continue to ask what happened to our donated dollars destined to support improvement of surgical facilities on Salt Spring.

And now, as the months go by, we see disheartening changes have already taken place at our formerly vibrant hospital. Some of you may recall the expression “cascading effect” used in reference to the loss of one of the key services that are essential in an acute care hospital. We warned of this danger when surgical services were discontinued in 2008.

Our health services have a long history of underfunding. Had Greenwoods not been neglected by VIHA, had home care not been underfunded by VIHA, had mental health services not been underfunded by VIHA, had needed surgical services been provided, Lady Minto Hospital would still be providing the same degree of acute care that this community has the right to expect under the Canada Health Act.

The surgeons have been made unwelcome, the \$3-million operating room is used once a week and the hospital resembles an extended care facility. Is this what was promised?

No, indeed. Certain community members were asked what was their priority. It was assumed that the money would start flowing in that direction. Has it? Sadly, no.

Meanwhile, the SOS Committee has definitely not floated away on the ebb tide. To satisfy the 2,000 souls who demonstrated their frustration by signing postcards, as well as those who still wish to do so, please know that we are here, determined as ever, to find where this ton of money went.

Some of you will remember attending the last meeting with our esteemed Vancouver Island Health Authority when it chose to consult with the local citizenry. It was June 2010, and it was less a consultation than a series of rationalizations handed down to justify what now appears to be a pre-determined agenda. Centralize surgical services; contract them out if you will, and the money saved will pour down from above to provide succour for all the other underfunded needs on the island. If only

As promises go, they came through with one, a psychiatric nurse. We are grateful. But as a replacement for the loss of an entire surgical facility, this clearly lacks balance.

It also lacks fairness, it lacks common sense, it certainly lacks community input, and dare we say it, it also lacks an honest attempt to solve the conundrum of a facility that was running full bore, the surgeon with a three-month waiting list, to the empty rooms and “low demand” that we were told justified closure.

What went wrong? When and why did the policy change? Who were the decision makers?

Why were not the fire department, the emergency advisory commission, the school district, Ganges Coast Guard, search and rescue, ambulance personnel, not to mention the entire population of the Gulf Islands not consulted by this health authority? Are we to believe these weren't considered valid “stakeholders” in the continuing health of our hospital?

Do we really want to settle for Lady Minto retreating and retiring to a long-term care facility? Let your voices be heard! SOS members will be out and about with more postcards for you to sign in the days ahead. This is going to be an election issue.

Write letters, toot horns, do anything — but don't let go of this issue. We need to demand a full explanation of how this all went down.

The writers are SOS Committee members.

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