

# In Depth - SOS needs to redirect its focus

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**By Dr. JAN MACPHAIL**

As a 26 year resident of Salt Spring and family doctor working at Lady Minto Hospital I repeat my June 1, 2009 plea for the SaveOurSurgery "SOS" folks to redirect their focus and energy.

A surgeon is not essential to guarantee that Lady Minto stays open offering comprehensive medical care.

The decision, made locally and supported by VIHA, to move forward without surgery here was/is not political. It was made because that is the best option for caring for people who live here. It's rather ironic that the SOS committee is politically motivated.

Hopefully all SSI residents want to support our hospital. I believe that most people, including the SOS committee, want to optimize local health care.

But is the SOS helping island residents? Fear-mongering clamour with incessant demands to reopen the operating room is completely out of touch with the reality of current conditions. Yet SOS blasts on, apparently valuing the work and opinion of a surgeon more than that of any of our non-surgeon medical professionals (GPs, psychiatrists, radiologists, internal medicine specialists, midwives).

I don't understand why people weren't appalled and outraged when the SOS chairperson insinuated that Lady Minto's doctors know less than she does about what we need to do our work (Driftwood, January 26, 2011). "SOS activism" shows an unbelievable lack of appreciation for local physicians, our experience and our contributions to local health care and planning.

Many communities in Canada are actively recruiting doctors, doing everything possible to keep their doctors and are delighted when local physicians participate in health care planning. Anyone with relevant experience knows that rural hospitals depend on family doctors. We know what we need and do the best we can with what we have.

An analogy may clarify our situation (an impending crisis in my opinion). Think of Lady Minto Hospital as a bus that belongs to a fleet of buses run by VIHA. VIHA supports our bus. Sooner or later most islanders need a bus ride, perhaps transferring to another bus off-island.

The Ministry of Health maintains the roads. The LMH bus driver (Bill Relph) and associate driver (Dr. Shane Barclay) care about passengers, are very experienced and know the roads well. For smooth, safe driving in all weather they rely on a huge, sometimes invisible crew of amazing people: staff in admitting, health records/IM/IT, social work, pharmacy, administration, physiotherapy, the unit clerks, activities aide and mental health team. The work of everyone in every department is crucial. VIHA provides gas; the LMH Foundation sometimes top-ups the tank. We have deluxe cushioned seats because of the hard work of LMH volunteers and the LMH Auxiliary.

Our bus has four wheels. Nursing staff and midwives keep one tire inflated, swiftly and expertly patching holes. Housekeeping, maintenance and dietary staff find air for the second tire. Lab and X-ray departments arrive day and night to keep another tire inflated.

Volunteer family doctors keep the fourth tire inflated. We are NOT VIHA employees. We are NOT required to do this and could just ride our bicycles (offices). We help with the bus because that is best for islanders who might need a ride. Like every department, without us the bus cannot run. We're grateful when specialized doctors

(surgeons for example) help, but we can and do work without them. The local family doctors keep the fourth tire inflated. That's only a small part of our work. Our tire leaks. A few of us are exhausted.

Several family doctors are thinking of giving up, perhaps moving, as others have done. Several GPs live but don't work here. They can work near or far in communities that show more appreciation. Elsewhere family doctors work shorter hours doing less challenging work with less responsibility and MUCH better pay.

In continuing with the analogy, this "bus" does not have an air conditioner (operating room). The SOS lobby insists that the bus needs an air conditioner to be safe.

Fourteen local doctors have said our bus doesn't need air conditioning (January 19, 2011, Driftwood, "Doctors' opinion on surgery"). SOS is blowing hot air onto an air conditioner that doesn't work, and that won't make the air conditioner work. It just raises the temperature inside the bus while the tires go flat. Redirected, that hot air could help keep the bus running and tires inflated.

As a community, please stop demanding air conditioning. Instead, show that you value the work of everyone who works on the "bus." Lobby politicians to spend money on what the "bus crew" say they need to look after the real patients who come through Lady Minto's doors.

Thank Dr. Barclay for establishing a multi-doctor clinic (King's Lane helps with our tire) and for his ongoing contributions to Lady Minto: keeping our dysfunctional emergency room functional, attracting several visiting specialists and securing funding for innovative pilot projects that expand the services available to all of us.

Respect the collective recommendations of your GPs who are already in short supply. Family doctors know what health concerns patients bring to our offices and emergency room and why hospitalized patients are there. We're certain that almost everyone who needs a cool environment would have to be transferred even if Lady Minto had a fancy air-conditioned room.

Accept that our air conditioner doesn't work right now and that perhaps we shouldn't have bought a new one when we did. The air conditioner isn't essential to ride on our bus or to get to your destination.

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