

# In Response: Health, safety, comfort is SOS ‘agenda’

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I’m writing in response to the Jan. 26 Viewpoint by Don Gainor, in which he argues that the operating room at Lady Minto Hospital is not feasible.

This is a remarkable statement from a former board member of the Vancouver Island Health Authority, which only a few short years ago requested substantial funding from the Capital Region Hospital Board (CRHD, representing all taxpayers in the Capital Region) and from local donors, stating at the time that upgrading the operating room was their top capital funding priority for Salt Spring.

In April 2008, Dr. Shane Barclay, chief of staff at LMH, presided at an internal review committee which concluded that “surgical services continue to be supported at LMH. VIHA should also be asked to explore possible extended surgical services . . . .”

In other words, general surgery at LMH is not only feasible but should also be expanded.

The Viewpoint statements about Dr. Roy Preshaw, the local surgeon whose hospital privileges were withdrawn by VIHA and the chief of staff, are also troubling.

Neither Dr. Barclay nor VIHA have explained the reasons for this action, but to the best of our knowledge it had nothing to do with professional competence.

Dr. Preshaw is more than qualified as a surgeon. He was a trauma specialist in charge of surgery at the Foothills Hospital in Calgary.

In fact, Dona MacKie, the operating room supervisor at Lady Minto, was quoted in the Nov. 24, 2004 Driftwood as saying that Dr. Preshaw’s “calibre is unheard of in small rural hospitals.”

The comments of this former VIHA board member and the failure of VIHA to find a replacement for Dr. Preshaw failed to mention that VIHA was offering just two half days of operating time a week.

This is not because of insufficient demand — surgical services have been offered on Salt Spring for decades and, before the advent of the health authority, for up to five days a week.

Our population continues to grow.

VIHA’s inadequate budget and restricted operating time was the main stumbling block to success in recruiting a new resident surgeon.

Despite only two advertisements on VIHA’s part, a number of qualified surgeons responded but were not accepting of the limited operating hours.

Dr. Preshaw and Dr. Sira have submitted a written offer to the health authority to provide surgical services for 18 months to allow for continuation of the replacement search and as yet have not received a response to their offer.

The Save Our Surgery Committee has been in contact with our MLA Murray Coell on a regular basis.

Mr. Coell has told our delegation there is a “hands-off” approach on the part of the Ministry of Health to the actions and decisions of the health authorities.

However, under Canada’s Constitution, health care is a provincial government responsibility and whether or not there is the establishment of another jurisdiction the government is still basically responsible.

Mr. Gainor thoughtfully included a list of laudable projects recently completed at Lady Minto Hospital.

Donors who have expressed their disappointment in the current circumstance of the closed-down surgical facility would be more upset to think the money they donated expressly for the new operating room was used for some other project, no matter how worthwhile that project might be.

All documentation regarding the funding of the new OR includes \$780,000 from the donations made to the Lady Minto Hospital Foundation.

The new construction at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria is a splendid monument to centralization by VIHA, and though it certainly is excellent, it fits perfectly with an economist’s dream of monetary efficiency, but leaves individual people as mere pawns in the big picture. It also emphasizes how LMH and other rural hospitals are really “small potatoes” in VIHA’s empire. In these circumstances, community support is essential.

There was a suggestion in the Viewpoint of Jan. 26 that members of the Save Our Surgery Committee have a “political agenda.”

I can assure you we do have an agenda and it is, pure and simple, the health, safety and comfort of the citizens of Salt Spring Island.

The writer chairs the SOS Committee and has years of experience in the health-care field.

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