

In Response - Actions speak louder than words

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By RAYMOND E. PHILLIPS

This is a response to the Jan. 19 letter from medical staff president Dr. Manya Sadouski and 14 colleagues.

The SOS committee has noted the above letter with interest. We want to correct and clarify the points made in the letter. The SOS committee has never claimed to represent the opinions of the doctors on our island.

I was both surprised and disappointed to find my family doctor's name on the letter in question. I had an appointment with him on the morning following the publishing that item in the Driftwood. In justifying his support he made two comments: that he felt he should support the majority of his colleagues and remarked that the SOS committee had earned the opposition of the doctors in the community. He regretted that our committee had not chosen to work with the doctors.

Shortly after SOS was formed we contacted Dr. Sadouski's predecessor to seek a meeting with the medical staff. That request was rejected. On its face, the doctors' letter makes no sense in the light of the history that led to the planning, financing and construction of our state-of-the-art surgical suite, which opened in December of 2004. A closer examination of the facts leading the current situation will clarify the issue.

In 2002 the process of assessing the needs for building a new surgery began, culminating in the decision to construct the new OR. The medical community supported that decision. By that time, Vancouver Island Health Authority had

spearheaded the campaign for financing with a \$1,000,000 contribution toward the cost and solicited and received \$1,100,000 from the Capital Regional Hospital District, with the \$780,000 balance being provided from Salt Spring residents collected by the Lady Minto Hospital Foundation. Sometime before the OR opening in December 2004, VIHA adopted, as with other health authorities throughout the province, a policy of centralization in the large population centres at the expense of the delivery of medical services to local communities.

To evaluate the truth of this statement regarding VIHA's policy change, the old maxim that "actions speak louder than words," a review of those actions is appropriate here. When the OR opened, after spending almost \$3,000,000, it was only funded for two days a week and then further limited to two half days a week. It would have clearly been an outrage if VIHA hadn't opened the facility. Despite recent statements opposing reopening the OR in the press and television, Dr. Shane Barclay signed a memo, along with other doctors, in 2008 supporting the continuation of surgical services (a copy of that document can be found on the SOS website.) It bears repeating that a memo in 2009 between hospital administrator Bill Relph and a VIHA staffer stated that reopening of the surgery was not the direction that they wanted to go in and he wished that the SOS committee would "float away." The memo was dated before the so-called needs assessment was even initiated. The CEO of VIHA, Howard Waldner, as recently as 2009, assured island residents in a letter that the OR at Lady Minto would remain open.

The character of the corporate culture of VIHA has been brought into question. In confidence, I have been told by one doctor that he stopped attending meetings sponsored by VIHA because he could not rely on anything that they said. Members of our committee have talked to nurses who have revealed that they are under "gag orders" not to publicly talk about events at Lady Minto Hospital.

Island residents should know that the island's doctors' hospital privileges are subject to VIHA's annual review. That review process explains why the last general surgeon was forced to resign. It is fair to assume that our local doctors are aware that they serve at the pleasure of VIHA.

With regard to the need for, and the viability of, a surgical service, what has changed? Nothing, except the policy of that bureaucratic nightmare named VIHA.

The writer is a member of the Save Our Surgery committee.

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