

# Letter - Realistic appraisal

Gulf Islands Driftwood

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The Vancouver Island Health Authority has released its community study of Salt Spring, and provided a range of recommendations for the organization of health services on the island.

There will be some who will be disappointed in the recommendation that the island not support a general surgeon. However, the case for not renewing surgical services on the island is clearly established. Amongst several reasons, the surgical volume is insufficient to sustain a surgeon's income, to reinforce her or his skills, and the volume is simply not there to sustain a vital, high-quality, pre-operative, intra-operative and post-operative surgical service with all its human and infrastructure requirements.

While some will focus on what is not in the report, it is important to highlight what is in the report: a call for support for the general practitioners on the island; a clear recognition of vast deficits in our ability to meet the considerable burden of psychiatric disease and drug addiction on this island; the pressing importance of caring for our seniors, and plans to respond to those needs. These plans, combined with the recognition that Lady Minto Hospital is reaching the end of its lifespan and needs replacement, reflect a realistic appraisal of our community's strengths and challenges.

The recommendations are broad and, in general, well justified. Recommendations are clustered around several themes, including geriatrics, mental health, hospital infrastructure, human resources, as well as recognition for increased integration of community services, and support for our GPs. The recommendations are well thought out and represent, in the main, a set of coherent priorities. The recommendations regarding terminating the surgical services (but sustaining endoscopy) will be controversial, but when seen as part of a larger package of improvements to our community health services, the package of recommendations reflect, on balance, a coherent and sustainable vision for community health.

If I have an objection to the report, it is that it fails to document and address the distressing and potentially catastrophic levels of susceptibility of our children to vaccine-preventable diseases. This public health priority merited more attention than was provided in the document.

As a community we would be wise to endorse these recommendations and to focus our attention on the opportunities and promises of support expressed in the report. My question is this: How quickly will VIHA, Community Services, the Lady Minto Hospital Foundation and other agencies on the island move to implement these recommendations? (Oh, and please, let's not forget about childhood immunizations!)

- ROB JAMES, Salt Spring