

Viewpoint - VIHA interests dominate report

Gulf Islands Driftwood

Published: June 02, 2010 10:00 AM

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The Save Our Surgery committee did a “quick study” over the weekend of the Salt Spring Island Health Review, which was released on Thursday, May 27.

This report is not only many months late but is a Vancouver Island Health Authority in-house report and reflects the attitudes and interests of VIHA.

Prior to the May 2009 provincial election, our MLA Murray Coell promised islanders that if re-elected his number one priority would be to restore surgical services at Lady Minto Hospital. Shortly after the election, the SOS committee met with Mr. Coell. At this meeting Mr. Coell was asked to arrange a meeting for the committee with the newly appointed Minister of Health, Kevin Falcon. He was also asked to accompany the delegation of the committee to that meeting. Mr. Coell agreed on both counts.

In lieu of that meeting we were notified by Mr. Coell that a needs assessment study for Salt Spring would be done and that it would be completed by December 2009.

Lady Minto Hospital is an institution that has long been supported by the community in a variety of ways, including generous monetary donations and many thousands of volunteer hours. Initially the hospital was supported and paid for by the community and has had ongoing surgical services for decades, until now. One of the reasons many of the islanders elected to move to Salt Spring is due to the services available at the hospital.

The VIHA board is a “big city” organization that is appointed, not democratically elected, with a hired executive branch receiving generous salaries.

The VIHA review is clearly driven by and more concerned with the bottom line than with the many ramifications of the decision to discontinue surgery at Lady Minto Hospital. It makes no attempt to quantify the resulting actual costs to island residents and the less easily quantifiable social and inevitable family disruptions when an island resident is transferred elsewhere for surgery that could easily be performed at LMH. These referrals are made to other hospitals that are already understaffed and over-burdened in their attempt to serve their own constituents.

The review contains irrelevancies and misinterpreted information and makes recommendations for services that are already in place. The interviews were carried out by the director of planning for VIHA and in some cases the interviewees were instructed to not divulge the content of the interview to their membership.

The review places a great deal of importance on the age of the residents and makes much of the thought that the present population will continue to age so there will be more and more seniors — all the more reason to make the services they need available and safely in their own community. A general surgeon who previously had privileges at LMH has assured the community that there is plenty of work for a general surgeon here.

The SOS committee realizes there are many other health care service needs. Outstanding is the lack of staff and of facilities for the mentally ill both in the community and in the hospital. We commend the work of the mental health groups in their quest for much improved care for the mentally ill.

Let us be clear, however, that these needs and the obvious priority need for a fully functioning operating room are not mutually exclusive. A minor increased allocation from the VIHA budget would see a satisfactory solution to both deficits and better meet the needs of the community.

The above was written by the SOS committee and submitted by its chair Phyllis Bolton.