

Cortes Island (Area I) Regional Director's Report

The first challenge one is presented with when elected regional director is to represent your community while thinking regionally. The current issue that fully encompasses this challenge is the location of the proposed regional hospital. In this report I have tried to outline the history of those discussions and the rationale behind the latest recommendation being forwarded to VIHA.

Regional Hospital Location

The regional hospital discussion between the Comox Strathcona Regional Hospital Board (CSRHB) and the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) has been ongoing since I was first elected. Here's a brief history of some of the milestones in that discussion. Please note that throughout all the discussions the CSRHB has consistently urged VIHA to provide upgrades to the existing facilities in order to maintain quality health care services during the lengthy 10-13 year transition period. (Should the regional hospital concept move forward construction would start in 10 years with a 2-3 year build out.)

Late September 2006 VIHA announced the location of a new regional hospital at the Dove Creek intersection on Highway 19. Over time it became clear that the proposed Dove Creek site, which encouraged development in a rural area and required significant infrastructure development, was not acceptable. March 1 of this year, the Chair of CSRHB wrote a letter informing VIHA that the hospital board did not support the selection of the Dove Creek site for a new regional hospital. The question, "If not Dove Creek then where?" presented itself immediately.

Over time the CSRHB has heard all points of view—from doctor's, nurses, politicians and the general public. At the May 24 meeting the CSRHB recommended that should a regional hospital be built that the Campbell River Hospital emergency services be maintained and upgraded. The hospital board also recommended that the number of beds for patients not requiring attention by specialists be maintained in the Campbell River Hospital so that GP's can admit and treat patients there. The hospital board recommended the best site for a regional facility is in the Comox Valley with good highway access. Patient's requiring specialists would be transferred to the regional hospital. A total of 19 Board members were present and voted on the recommendation as outlined above—16 in support and 3 opposed. I voted in support of the recommendation, as did directors representing Zeballos, Tahsis, Gold River, Kyuquot-Nootka, and Sayward. This is a clear indication that we acted as a regional body giving full consideration to what is best for the majority of the regional constituents.

Now here are some of the reasons for the strongly supported recommendation.

--The Comox Valley currently has the greatest population and all indications are that the majority of future growth will be in the Comox Valley. Based on current and predicted growth, the Comox Valley is the logical location for a regional hospital.

--The Comox hospital currently has 49 specialists. The Campbell River hospital has 17. Both hospitals have experienced difficulty recruiting and retaining specialists. Given the Comox Valley has the most specialists living there already, the number of

additional specialists needed to be recruited for a regional hospital will be substantially less. The area in which most of the specialists already reside weighs the decision.

--The hospital building in Comox is old and is more difficult to upgrade to accommodate modern operating standards. Its operational functions vary from VIHA procedures.

--VIHA has already committed funds to both the Campbell River General Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital to maintain a practical level of care until a regional hospital is built.

--The CSRHB's support of a regional hospital contains a clear request for VIHA's assurance that once the regional hospital is built, the Campbell River hospital would retain emergency services and overnight accommodation. VIHA's own documents state that the Campbell River hospital will continue to provide urgent care, some diagnostic procedures, transitional/rehab care, palliative care, and acute and chronic pain management services.

--The CSRHB motion also calls on VIHA to consult fully with the medical staff at Campbell River General Hospital in order to lead to a mutually satisfactory and practical model to best serve the needs of the North Island.

The Comox-Strathcona Regional Hospital Board has always maintained that decisions regarding hospital facilities in our region must be based on the best way to supply medical care to the patients of the north island. Presently, many residents travel to Nanaimo, Victoria, or Vancouver to undergo complex procedures offered by other regional hospitals. A Comox Valley based regional hospital will provide these services to the residents of the North Island. After all the discussion and debate thus far, a regional hospital in the Comox Valley plus a functioning Campbell River hospital represents the logical option for medical services for this area.

Please keep in mind the ultimate decision will be made by VIHA not the CSRHB. The next step in procuring regional medical care as outlined in the CSRHB recommendation is to get a written commitment from the Province in support of maintaining the Campbell River Hospital should a regional hospital be built. Discussions with VIHA will continue.

If you have any questions about this or any other issue feel free to contact me at 935-6488 Monday through Friday 9:00 am to 4 pm. (No early morning, late night or weekend calls, please.) If you get the answering machine try my cell phone--202-6488. You can also email me at brijen@oberon.ark.com anytime.

Respectfully Submitted by Jenny Hiebert—Regional Director