



## 'Golden Decade' health promises fall short

Aging residents of the Saanich Peninsula are facing indifference from politicians

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The threat of closure of the Saanich Peninsula Hospital spurred the birth of the Saanich Peninsula Health Association in 2000, but although the hospital has survived, it is under continuous threat.

Since 2001, the Campbell government has only funded operating costs and has not provided the capital funding needed for new or refurbished buildings and equipment, without which the hospital would deteriorate and could no longer function effectively or safely.

Thus the new emergency department, CT-scanner and new or refurbished operating rooms were funded by donations and Capital Regional District taxpayers while surgeons appear in bus-shelter advertisements, begging for donations.

Worse yet, even basic operating room equipment and surgical instruments are being funded by donations -- yet government and local Liberal MLAs remain indifferent. While old-age security payments are frozen, vulnerable elderly people in the hospital's long-term care face steep fee increases.

The Vancouver Island Health Authority cancelled surgical procedures for us, while Health Minister Kevin Falcon muses about using "surplus capacity" to treat patients from Saskatchewan.

Our community public hospital has virtually become a charity hospital. Is Premier Gordon Campbell just waiting to sell it to foreign speculators as a private clinic? Ask the patient who has waited 48 hours for a bed on an ER gurney about "surplus capacity."

Small wonder that there is anger and cynicism in the community!

We have been lied to for years.

Remember this? "The primary health-care renewal program [will] focus ... to take pressure off acute care services. Patients will have access to interdisciplinary teams of health-care professionals, which may include physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dieticians and other health-care providers."

That was what the health planning minister, Sindi Hawkins, said in 2002.

Then, in 2005, Campbell promised action by setting up the Council on Aging and Seniors Issues, announcing "Great Goals for a Golden Decade." What did we get? Nothing!

The council called for high-quality sustainable and accessible health services with primary-care renewal and quick access a high priority, using salaried professional health-care teams in multi-disciplinary clinics. The result was an appalling failure.

Services are less available and the recent ill-thought-out cuts by VIHA have made things worse, as witness the stream of horror stories in readers' letters to the Times Colonist.

The association's core principle is that health care starts in the community, based on key determinants such as income and housing with primary health care the vital element.

We are not alone. The Health Council of Canada, established by first ministers, focused on primary health care and home-care renewal. Health care, the care of our physical or mental well-being, starts with us; how we live our lives, what we eat and drink, how we treat our bodies, and is directly linked to social determinants of health.

But if people have insufficient income and lack primary health care, Campbell's "Great Goals" are nothing but platitudes.

Halfway through the "Golden Decade" the Winter Olympics have displaced those goals.

The demographics of Saanich Peninsula emphasize the importance of primary health care, home care and long-term care. The median age of people on the Peninsula is one of the highest in Canada -- in Sidney it is estimated to be 51 years versus 39 years nationally.

The Council on Aging contradicted the bogus myth that the larger proportion of older people will be a financial catastrophe for the health system, stating "these doom and gloom projections are not borne out by actual experience." The major cost increase is "more costs per person."

Many people remain without family physicians, whose crucial community role has been undervalued and neglected for years. Even those with a family physician do not have the "same day access" called for by the Council and the B.C. Primary Healthcare Charter.

Politicians refuse to acknowledge that instead of a national public health-care system, we have an inefficient mishmash, and the high median age on the Peninsula is because a significant percentage of the elderly move here from other provinces.

Yet there is no recognition that higher costs incurred by generational migration

should be funded by the provinces of origin.

Our battered public health-care system, the magnificent legacy of Tommy Douglas, is basically sound.

Campbell and Saanich North and the Islands MLA Murray Coell should stop hiding behind Olympic torches and start serving the citizens who pay their salaries.

Carol Pickup, Lyne England and David Olsen wrote on behalf of the Board of the Saanich Peninsula Health Association, which promotes preservation and enhancement of services at Saanich Peninsula Hospital, and awareness of health care and services on the Saanich Peninsula.

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