

# Community Residential Hospice: A solution to our hospital bed crisis

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We read regularly about the large number of seniors living in hospital beds while they await space in community nursing homes. There are also a large number of palliative patients living in hospital beds because they can no longer be at home. In fact, 50 per cent of the people living with a palliative illness in our area die in one hospital every year - the Saint John Regional Hospital. Two hundred die in the Palliative Care Unit, while another 200 live out their final days in acute care hospital beds outside of the Palliative Care Unit.

Most of us prefer to be at home for as long as possible when living with serious illness. But, in the final weeks of life it can be difficult for families to provide the 24-hour care and support needed. They are often exhausted, frightened and in need of support themselves. And, without sufficient financial resources to hire 24-hour care, hospital becomes the only option.

Hospice Greater Saint John wants to give people a choice - a Residential Hospice. In Canada, hospice palliative care is a set of services offered in four settings: Home, Hospital, Nursing Homes and Residential Hospices. Community Residential Hospices are essential for people living with a life-threatening illness who can no longer be cared for in their own homes. They offer compassionate and cost-effective quality care for people who do not require the expensive and highly medical, technical care available in an acute care hospital unit. They are designed to be a home away from home - a place to live out the final weeks and months of life in peace, dignity and comfort surrounded by loved ones and cared for by a team of qualified health care professionals and volunteers who support patients and families on this difficult journey.

Hospice has purchased the former St. Joseph's Convent to establish a 10-bed Residential Hospice - the first in Atlantic Canada. This home is located in a peaceful, residential neighborhood on a landscaped lot with beautiful gardens and parking. The home has a large dining room and kitchen, a chapel, living rooms, family rooms, a library, 13-bedrooms on the second floor for the Residential Hospice and four

bedrooms on the third floor for families who may wish to stay on site while their loved one is at the Residential Hospice.

Most Residential Hospices care for 130 to 150 patients per year in the last 3 to 4 weeks of life - patients that will otherwise occupy acute care hospital beds. The cost of care for 130 patients in a Residential Hospice is \$300/day or \$860,000 per year in comparison to \$1,000/day or \$2.86 million dollars a year for care in an acute care hospital bed at the Saint John Regional Hospital.

To save money, our government would need to close hospital beds, which is not likely given the demand for acute care beds. However, Hospice is offering our government the opportunity to free up 130 acute care beds and to re-allocate over \$2.28 million to acute care services. Imagine the difference this could make for wait times and healthcare for services such as joint replacements, cancer treatments, cataract surgery, post-operative care, admissions from the emergency room, etc.

All of this is possible for an annual investment of \$580,000 to support the delivery of nursing care in our 10-bed Residential Hospice. At this rate, government's costs would amount to a mere \$200/day in comparison to the \$1,000/day they currently pay at the hospital. Hospice is prepared to fundraise the additional \$260,000 needed per year to operate the Residential Hospice.

Residential Hospice is a proven model of quality healthcare that has become an important part of healthcare reform in other Canadian provinces. In October 2005, the Ontario Government announced annual funding in the amount of \$580,000 for 30 residential hospices.

Work has already begun on the renovations needed to open our Residential Hospice. Now we need the Government of New Brunswick to provide the funding needed to open these 10 beds. A solution to the growing hospital bed crisis at the Saint John Regional Hospital lies in our own backyard.