

Editorial – Tuesday, February 16, 2010

In May, the first residential hospice in Atlantic Canada will open in Saint John. By October, the hospice will be ready to accept its first patient. This project would never have been possible without individual leadership, community support and a far-sighted commitment by the provincial government.

The leadership has come from Dr. Nancy Grant, who has campaigned to build a facility for palliative care patients that is more like a residence than a hospital ward. As a radiation oncologist Dr. Grant saw the palliative care issue from an intimate perspective. For 27 years, she has worked to raise awareness of the need for appropriate end-of-life services within New Brunswick's health-care system. It has not been easy, but she has never given up - and this week's pledge of funding by Premier Shawn Graham is a vindication of her hard work and dedication.

Hospice Greater Saint John will tend to some 200 patients a year, offering dying New Brunswickers and their families a quality of care that can only be provided in a dedicated residential setting. It will also reduce the demand on hospital services, allowing administrators to re-allocate resources for acute-care patients. The efficiency savings to the health-care system has been estimated at \$2.8 million a year.

Dr. Grant's vision of what a residential hospice program could achieve for New Brunswick has won the support of many medical professionals and community volunteers. They have worked through Hospice Greater Saint John to devise a strategy, raise funds and spread the word. Dr. Chris O'Brien, of the palliative care unit at Saint John Regional Hospital, now serves as Hospice Greater Saint John's medical director. As executive director of the organization, Sandy Johnson deserves credit for the success of its fundraising and public education efforts, which have brought the community together.

Both the Department of Energy and the Department of Social Development have contributed to Hospice's fundraising drives. But the provincial government's decision to commit \$730,000 in operational funding is a formal acknowledgement that the hospice model is good public policy.

Having recognized the value that hospices can deliver in quality of patient care and efficient use of resources, we hope the provincial government will build on this commitment.

Other regions could benefit from hospices, too - and Hospice Greater Saint John has developed a model of care that could be employed at the community level, province-wide.