

Hospice, province to draw up pact

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FREDERICTON - The Hospice of Greater Saint John is a step closer to launching a residential program in the Port City.



Sandy Johnson, Hospice Executive Director

A group representing the hospice met in Fredericton Tuesday with Health Minister Mike Murphy, Social Development Minister Mary Schryer and government officials.

Hospice executive director Sandy Johnson said both sides agreed to have a contract confirmed by the end of 2009 that would outline the province's contribution to the operational budget.

"Residential hospice is a go, and it's very real, and that was the sense this morning," Johnson said following the meeting.

The residential hospice annual budget is \$940,000, and it is requesting \$730,000 from the provincial government. This works out to \$200 a day, 365 days a year.

Johnson said the hospice is aiming to have the residential program up and running by April 2010. It will be located at a building being renovated at 385 Dufferin Row.

Murphy and Schryer declined to comment on the meeting, but a spokeswoman for the Department of Social Development said although an agreement on a contract hadn't been reached, "it was a very productive meeting and there was a good exchange of ideas."

Proponents of the residential hospice contend they can save the province more than \$2.28 million a year because many palliative care patients are now being treated in more expensive acute care beds.

Johnson said the hospice needs an additional \$500,000 to finish the renovations.

"The province has invested \$320,000 to date.

"That's 20 per cent of our budget, so I think they've done their part," she said.

Johnson is hoping to get additional contributions from the federal government, private donors and foundations.

"That's our big push right at the moment and we need that very, very quickly," she said.

Johnson was joined at the meeting by hospice board chairman Patrick Woods, hospice founder Dr. Nancy Grant and Dr. Chris O'Brien, hospice medical director.

The meeting was originally scheduled for Feb. 23, but was postponed because of a snowstorm.