

Hospice says it can save N.B. money

Health A hospice bed costs \$300 per day while a hospital bed costs \$1,000 per day

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Telegraph-Journal - Published Monday September 24th, 2007

SAINT JOHN - *Editor's note: The following is the last in a three-part series looking at a Saint John group making a strong pitch to the province to change the way it delivers palliative care through a residential hospice.*

If the province agrees to help fund a 10-bed residential hospice in Saint John, more than \$2.28 million a year could be reallocated to acute-care services, say proponents of Hospice of Greater Saint John.

According to figures provided by the local hospice, cost of a residential hospice is \$300 per-bed per-day or \$800,000 per year, compared to \$1,000 per-bed per-day in an acute-care hospital setting, or \$2.86 million dollars a year.

Hospice of Greater Saint John is willing to pay \$100 per-bed, per day, leaving the province to fund \$200 per bed - that translates into government savings of \$2.28 million per year.

Each year, more than 200 dying patients occupy acute care beds that are meant for health care services such as emergency room admissions, post-operative care, joint replacements and cataract surgery, says Dr. Nancy Grant, founder and honorary chairwoman of Hospice.

The average stay in a hospice residence is 17 to 22 days; hospice officials believe a 10-bed residence would free up to 130 to 150 acute-care beds each year.

"One of the reasons the cost of care is cheaper is the nursing levels," says Hospice executive director Sandy Johnson.

"We are staffed with one RN (registered nurse) per shift.

"The non-medical service are often supplied by volunteers - some of the cooking, the cleaning, the gardening, all of those things. We have very large group of volunteers."

It's all possible, say proponents, for an annual investment of \$580,000, which means that government's costs would be reduced to \$200 per day, per bed.

Hospice is prepared to raise the additional \$220,000 needed per year to operate the residential hospice.

"The only criteria is there's no co-pay to the patient," says Johnson.

"Hospice is willing to be the co-pay, so if it's \$300 a day, we need \$200 from government and Hospice will pay the additional \$100."

Hospice is embarking on a \$1-million Realize the Dream fundraising campaign to raise \$645,600 for capital improvements, \$150,000 for supplies and \$200,000 to get the hospice through its first year of operations.