



PARTNERSHIPS CAN DO GREAT THINGS

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Sandy Johnson, executive director for hospice, left, Dr. Nancy Grant, Dr. Chris O'Brien, and Premier Shawn Graham, far right, gather at a table in the dining room at a new hospice Tuesday. The Hospice of Greater Saint John recently purchased a former convent on Dufferin Row in West Saint John and is lobbying government to help fund the 10-bed residential lodging for people at the end-of-life. Funding would allow more than \$2.28 million a year to be reallocated to acute-care services and free up 130-150 hospital beds a year. Hospice has offered to cost-share the residence with the province. For more information, contact Sandy Johnson, Executive Director at (506) 632-5723 or sjohnson@hospicesj.ca



Hospice of Greater Saint John founder Dr. Nancy Grant and Dr. Chris O'Brien, centre, director of the Saint John Regional Hospital's palliative care unit, listen as Premier Shawn Graham makes a point as he takes a tour Tuesday of the hospice building, known as Bobby's Hope House.

We'll see how it fits,' Graham says

Palliative care Premier doesn't rule out funding for residential hospice

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SAINT JOHN - Premier Shawn Graham will take a close look at how government might fund a residential hospice in Saint John.

Graham toured the Hospice of Greater Saint John's recently purchased former convent on Tuesday afternoon and, although impressed with the working prototype the group presented and with the physical building it purchased in July, he fell short of making a firm funding commitment.

The challenge, he said, is that government is six months into this year's budget, although he did not rule out including it in the next allocation of provincial cash.

Another consideration, he said, is that Mary Schryer, Minister of State for Seniors and Housing, is on the cusp of releasing a long-term care strategy that is due by the end of the year, a report that the premier alluded to a couple of times during the discussion, glancing toward Schryer as she sat beside him at the table.

"We'll see how it fits into the system .

. . what role government can play and make an informed decision," Graham told Hospice officials and members of the Saint John Liberal caucus who gathered around the dining room table at 385 Dufferin Row on the West Side.

Hospice of Greater Saint John is lobbying government to help fund a 10-bed residential hospice to allow more than \$2.28 million a year to be reallocated to acute care services and has offered to cost-share the residence with the province.

Hospice 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.

"It's definitely a model of how partnerships can do great things," Graham told the group.

Right now, more than 200 acute care hospital beds each year - beds that are meant for emergency room admissions, post-operative care and procedures such as joint replacements and cataract surgery - are being filled by palliative care patients. That is in addition to 200 beds in the Saint John Regional Hospital's palliative care unit.

According to figures provided by the local hospice, the 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 a year.

Hospice officials believe the residence would free up to 130 to 150 acute-care beds each year.

"We're willing to work with you on a new model of care," Sandy Johnson, Hospice executive director, told the premier.

The plan's potential was not lost on Graham, who paid close attention to a presentation by Johnson and agreed that the numbers he was seeing represent a cost-effective way of delivering palliative care.

He nodded repeatedly as Hospice founder Nancy Grant and Dr. Chris O'Brien, director of the Regional Hospital's palliative care unit, explained that a hospice residence provides palliative care for people suffering from any end-stage medical illness, such as cancer, heart and kidney disease or severe stroke.

As Graham was shown third-floor bedrooms that Hospice plans on using to house patients' families, he asked if the plan was to make the rooms revenue generators.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Grant.

The charge could be made with a view to breaking even, said the premier.

"Most people would probably want to make a donation," he said.

"I can see why you couldn't pass this up," Graham told Grant. "It's a strong structure and it's been well-maintained," he told her as she, O'Brien and Johnson took him on a tour of the rambling building, using the opportunity to bend his ear.

Schryer, Supply and Services Minister Roly MacIntyre, Saint John Lancaster MLA Abel LeBlanc and Hospice chairwoman Marilyn Craft joined the group as they made their way through the big, bright residence that is valued at \$1.66 million but the Sisters of Charity sold to Hospice for \$250,000.

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 residential hospice through its first year of operations.

Graham said his government has "strategic decisions" to make and that getting out into the community with stakeholders, as he did on Tuesday, will help him make those decisions.