

November 19, 2009

City to Lobby VIHA for Hospital Locums

At its November 17 meeting, City Council endorsed a recommendation to lobby the Vancouver Island Health Authority to immediately fund locums and to recruit and retain 2.5 to 3.5 new internal specialists for the Campbell River hospital's intensive care unit.

Mayor Charlie Cornfield presented a report to Council outlining current and anticipated staffing shortages.

The report refers to *"life and death time delays"* if replacement doctors are not in place to fill anticipated vacancies.

Running the intensive care unit (ICU) requires five, ideally six, internal medicine specialists to be available on call 24 hours a day (that is at the hospital or within 15 minutes travel) so up to five patients can be cared for and monitored by nurse(s) at a one-to-one ratio or one nurse to two patients at the hospital's ICU," the report states. Currently, 3.5 full time equivalent specialists are monitoring the ICU. As of January 1, 2010 the number will be 2.5, and *"it is unreasonable to expect 2.5 doctors to provide the service of the required five,"* says Mayor Cornfield.

"These doctors are also required to provide service in ER, post op and on the ward. In addition, they must maintain their practice. This staffing shortage creates an untenable situation; the remaining specialists cannot / will not provide coverage. The result: no ICU in Campbell River, therefore no operations, no operating rooms, no service to the community," says the Mayor's report, which was based on meetings earlier this month with doctors as well as the Citizens for Quality Health Care.

The report also explains that Campbell River cannot plan to simply transfer patients to St. Joseph's Hospital in Comox or to the hospital in Nanaimo; nor is it possible to send them to Victoria or Vancouver all the time due to the limited capacity at these facilities to accept out of town patients.

Council agreed the short-term solution to operating the ICU is for VIHA to immediately fund locums to stand in for doctor vacancies in the intensive care unit scheduling rotation. The long-term solution is to recruit and retain 2.5 to 3.5 new internal specialists to the Campbell River hospital.

"Recruiting for specialist services will become more difficult if service cuts take place at the hospital," the report states. *"It's particularly important to keep these services in place to ensure Campbell River is seen as a desirable place to locate a medical practice,"* the Mayor adds.

"Staff will draft a letter to the VIHA Board with copies to the Minister, SRD directors and North Island First Nations leaders to ensure this issue receives immediate attention," says the Mayor.

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