

The Independent – November 23, 2007

'Word is out' about Waterford

Dear editor,

Thank you very much for the recent articles by Stephanie Porter (*Waterford complaints rack up*, Nov. 2 edition) and Susan Rendell, *Life in the Cuckoo's Nest* (Nov. 9 edition), (with the exception of the chosen headline). The Canadian Mental Health Association, NL division raised concerns about conditions at the Waterford over 16 months ago following a tour I completed of designated units. It's impossible to say for sure but the public shedding of light on conditions at the province's psychiatric hospital may have helped government in deciding to allocate more than \$3 million to renovate the forensic service — far and away the unit in the poorest shape of those I visited.

But the other units are in desperate need of updating until we know the outcome of the hospital services study for the St. John's region. And, yes, funds will be required to do this and should not stand in the way. Government has already ponied up, but let me openly ask what is Eastern Health doing to address the antiquated conditions at the Waterford? What is Eastern Health able to do within its almost \$1-billion operating budget — surely something? What about the slippery issue of asking drug companies who make a lot of money to offer up air conditioning for units during the summer months?

Until we all know the outcome of the hospital services' study there can be no "head-in-the-sand" behaviour any longer about the Waterford conditions — the word is out and now public. It should be noted that it was the efforts of the mental health association's board and staff that pushed for a forum to discuss issues about the Waterford and will ensure follow-up and progress.

There is a great deal of work to do in what we call community mental health. And finally there is a national mental health commission to shed more light on the troubling issues. With time the commission may be able to get the federal government to financially assist the provinces for the failures of de-institutionalization some 25 years ago.

Meantime, we have asked the provincial government to consider an enhanced rent-supplement program for those who have been most disabled by their serious mental illness so they can try to live in better, safer conditions in the community.

Geoff Chaulk,
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