

Cataract surgery contracted out in Vancouver

Vancouver's Lions Gate Hospital has cut its waiting list for cataract surgery by 30% and freed up operating room time by contracting some services to a private clinic close to the North Shore hospital. The 3-month contracts began on a trial basis last July and will be assessed later this year.

The Northmount Eye Surgery Centre is well positioned to accept the steady flow of about 85 low-risk patients a month, says Clay Adams, spokesman for the North Shore health region, especially since 5 of the hospital's 6 ophthalmologists practise there. The cost of \$550 per eye, which is paid by the hospital, includes an allowance for the clinic's overhead costs. Meanwhile, about 40 high-risk cataract operations are still performed at Lions Gate each month, but waiting times have dropped from almost 5 months to 3.

"It's going very well," says Adams.

"Our patients are being seen on a much more timely basis and there is potential to speed up access even more. The benefits well outweigh the costs. It is an access issue, not a cost issue." Since 15% of local residents are older than 65, Adams expects demand for surgery will continue to grow; the move also creates more OR time at Lions Gate, allowing about 60 extra operations a month.

The health region did not seek the provincial health ministry's permission to contract for the cataract services. "All we are doing is changing the location of where the patients receive their service," says Adams. "We are not contravening the Canada Health Act because procedures are not based on people's ability to pay." The ministry has not expressed any concern about the arrangement; precedents for contracting out other services have already been set with hospitals in Washington State.

Adams, who worked with the Alberta Ministry of Health when contracting out was introduced there, had been anticipating some public outcry over the new arrangement, but says the response has been uniformly positive. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*

Care in the home

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Under IPSITH, acutely ill patients are receiving between 5 and 15 days of in-home care from a multidisciplinary community team that includes a case manager, nurse practitioner, the patient's family physician and health professionals from provider agencies (*CMAJ* 1999;161[11]:1437). Since April 1999, 39 FPs and nearly 40 specialists have agreed to participate in the program, which is expected to serve between 100 and 150 patients during the 2-year pilot period.

Cohen says house calls are not a thing of the past. She says a survey of London family physicians indicated that 60% to 70% of them make house calls; most involve elderly or severely disabled patients, but palliative care is becoming a larger part of home care. She says highly skilled teams of palliative care nurses in London offer tremendous assistance to family physicians. "It's become a real collaboration between all the team players to give [dying] patients optimum care in their homes."

As more and more people with significant illnesses and disabilities remain at home, Cohen foresees house calls becoming "absolutely necessary. We have to be more open to this kind of care. I hope the government looks at it that way as well." — *Lynne Swanson, London*



Dominique LaCasse, Wild West Communications

A humorous Year 2000 calendar has reaped big financial dividends for the Vernon Jubilee Hospital Emergency Department in Vernon, BC. About 5000 copies of the calendar, the brainchild of local doctors, were sold, raising \$25 000 for much-needed cardiac-monitoring equipment. Thanks to their efforts, community fundraising and a provincial grant, \$750 000 worth of monitors are now beeping away in Vernon. A series of brainstorming sessions led by family physician Bill Sanders resulted in the calendar's 12 humorous concepts. The most risqué photo, entitled "Say no to crack," showed 3 doctors modelling hospital gowns. In the photo above, surgeons John Crowley, Richard Creel and Ghee Hwang reveal the secret behind their cutting-edge surgical skills. "It would seem the citizens of Vernon appreciate seeing their medical role models in various states of undress and other humorous poses," says ER medical director Nick Balfour. The 2000 edition is sold out, but Sanders is devoting "1 or possibly 2 neurons" to concepts for a 2001 edition.