

Local news

JUDGE CRITICIZES HOSPITAL

PGRH technologist 'guilty' of sex assault during test

by KEN BERNISOHN
Staff reporter

A country court jury of six men and six women found hospital technologist James Brammer, 41, guilty Thursday of sexual assault on a 16-year-old girl while she was sedated during an examination last December.

The victim had attempted suicide, and was in the psychiatric ward of the Prince George Regional Hospital when she was taken down for the electroencephalograph examination, better known as an EEG, which helps doctors diagnose whether there is an organic problem with the brain.

At 9:30 p.m. Thursday, after about six hours of deliberation, the jury found that Brammer had the victim disrobe far more than was normal for the examination, then had fondled the victim, sucked on her breast, and manipulated her vagina with his hand.

The day of the incident the hospital launched an internal inquiry, but did not inform the RCMP of the allegation. The police became involved the next day when the victim's mother phoned them.

"The hospital should have reported the incident promptly to the police," Judge Richard Low said in his charge to the jury before their deliberations.

"I am surprised they did not. But the hospital is not on trial here. I only mention this in the course of the trial to make sure the hospital realized they acted badly and improperly in this matter... but that's water under the bridge. This case comes down to whether you believe the truth of this girl's story."

During the trial, defence attorney Rod Mackenzie had argued that, due to the problems the girl had — drinking, being expelled from school — her testimony could be unreliable.

He also discussed, at length, the mixture of drugs she was sedated with during the test, saying the combination of chloral hydrate and Trazadone could have caused hallucinations.

"You do not find him (the defendant) innocent or guilty. An acquittal means he was not proven guilty," he told the jury.

He explained this means that if the jury was not convinced of the defendant's guilt, or if they thought it was probable, the verdict would be not guilty. He said a guilty verdict should be brought in only if the defendant was proven guilty.

Crown Counsel Elizabeth Bayliff said it was true the girl was having problems, but at the time of the incident she had spent time at home over the holidays on day passes from the hospital, and was doing well in correspondence school.

"I submit she was a normal young woman, but with more troubles than some others of her age," Bayliff said.

Bayliff referred to the testimony of Dr. June Frye that the victim was always rational and lucid, and to the testimony of an RCMP drug expert that the individual drugs, and their mixture could not have caused hallucinations in the amount the victim was given.

"And even if they had an effect, it would have continued an hour to an hour and a half. The detail she was able to give immediately after the event was the kind not from hallucination or a dream, but from memory."

When she was returned to her room she was upset, crying, and nurses had her examined by a doctor, who found her vaginal area reddened, "consistent with what she says," Bayliff summarized.

Judge Low has scheduled sentencing for next Thursday.

SUPPORT WORKERS

HEU sets strike vote

Prince George members of the Hospital Employees Union will be "striking forthwith," according to the director of the HEU northern regional office.

John Hurren told the Citizen today that members will be taking their strike vote Monday at the Simon Fraser Inn. Meetings with the members are scheduled for 7:30 a.m., noon and 7:30 p.m., with polls open for voting after the meetings.

"The Industrial Relations Council was appealing the previous vote so this new vote is to be held under the auspices of the IRC."

HEU members employed at Prince George Regional Hospital had voted 92-per-cent in favor of strike action last week.

"We intend to give notice that we will be striking forthwith, depending on the vote of course, but I have no reason to believe it won't be in favor," Hurren said.

Asked if the nurses and HEU members are going to co-ordinate their strike efforts, Hurren said: "We are respecting their picket lines, but while the BCNU have already established their schedule, we are still in the process (of striking). We'll have to check with them and then decide what hospital the HEU will go out at."

Correction

A story which ran in the Wednesday edition of The Citizen contained a misquote which indicated that Chilean grapes are sometimes available at Extra Foods. The grapes are actually from Argentina. Union members are currently being asked to boycott pesticide-treated grapes from California and Chile.

HOUSING PROGRAM OUTLINED

by BERNICE TRICK
Staff reporter

There's a way for people with low annual incomes to obtain a family home, according to the senior officer for the Rural and Native Housing Program.

In a presentation Thursday to Fraser-Fort George Regional District directors, Jeff Butchart said Section 55 of the National Housing Act, or RNHP, is alive and available.

Right now, there are possibly eight applicants in this region who are looking to obtain a home through the program which is delivered and administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Only those living in substandard homes and with low annual incomes are eligible.

For example, a family of six requiring four bedrooms must have a gross annual income of less than \$22,000 while a family of four requiring two bedrooms would qualify only if the gross income is less than \$17,000.

Home sizes are determined by the National Occupancy Standard regulations which restricts the number of persons per bedroom.

Mortgage or rental payments comprise 25 per cent of the monthly income with any difference being subsidized by CMHC.

Besides providing basic homes, the main goal of the program is to teach families responsibility of budgeting, making payments, caring and maintaining a home.

Once settled, CMHC doesn't "just leave clients hanging."

CMHC takes care of any "major component failings — pertaining to health and safety factors," but encourages and assists occupants in solving problems themselves.

There are three ways for applicants to utilize the program — rental, which is for families with financial difficulties; lease-to-purchase for those "a little better off" and outright house purchase for clients who "demonstrate strong capability and responsibility to make payments and maintain the building."

The program is available only in rural areas or in communities with populations less than 2,500 and includes native, non-native, senior citizens and disabled persons.

Interested persons can call B.C. Native Housing Corporation, program delivery agent, at 562-9106.

Should homes become unoccupied, CMHC has the first right to purchase.

"There's no way for clients to profit. We buy the home back, maintain it, resell it or recycle it back into program," said Butchart.

Homes are modest in design and size to fit particular families.

Vandals wreck regional parks

Summer has just begun in the Prince George area, but already regional district parks are being vandalized.

In a report to Fraser-Fort George Regional District board of directors on Thursday, parks coordinator Keith Cupp told of two incidents of vandalism.

Damages in Harold Mann Park,

located on the Giscome Road east of Prince George, include four picnic tables "ripped out," broken and thrown in the lake, rocks from a rock wall pushed over a bank and vehicles passing through the restricted area to the lake shore.

At Wilkins Park, in the Miworth area, all-night parties are reported even though the park officially closes at night.

Cupp said offenders are in the park every night — sometimes until 6 a.m.

He said the gate is being left open since the new boat ramp was constructed because people like to get on the water as early as 6 a.m.

Leaving the gate open reduces damage to the gate, he said.

RCMP have been notified of the offences.

FFGRD directors discussed the issue, but took no further action.

Fire dept. vote slated

Residents of Willow River go to the polls July 29 to decide whether they want a fire department.

The cost and financing of the project is to be covered through a specified area tax base as well as an expected grant from the B.C. Lottery Fund.

Although the community has no water system, the committee doing the feasibility study feels the "timing is appropriate" due to the density of housing in the townsite and a water system now being proposed.

The area designated would serve about 350 people in 150 households.

Equipment required includes a pumper and tanker truck plus a portable water tank to serve as a reservoir for fire fighting purposes.

The tank, estimated to cost about \$1,000, will hold a minimum of 1,000 gallons of water to service the pumper truck on a continuous basis.

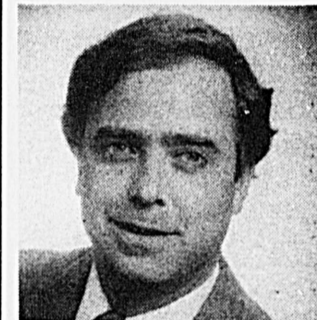
A proposed fire hall is a two-bay, 2,880-square-foot wood frame structure containing a meeting room and training facilities.

Capital costs to establish the department are estimated at \$270,000 while annual operating costs are expected to reach \$60,270.

About 25 per cent of financing towards the fire protection service will come from residential and farm property while 75 per cent will be generated from other types of property.

Residential property owners will be taxed \$3.41 per \$1,000 of assessed value. As an example, a home valued at \$50,000 would be taxed about \$170.

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CHILD CENTRE MONEY

Gov't given ultimatum

by SHERYL THOMPSON
Staff reporter

Parents of special needs children Thursday gave Health Ministry officials one week to get more money for the financially-troubled Child Development Centre, or the parents vow they'll take their protest to the B.C. Legislature.

Brad Gee, director of special care services, and Peter Van Rheenen, acting executive director of family and community health services, both with the health ministry, met with about 50 people Thursday afternoon at the Strathcona Street centre.

At the end of the meeting, the parents gave the government representatives their "bottom line."

"We are serious. We'll give you a week, then we're going to Victoria," said parent spokesman Terry Robertson.

"We have support from other child development centres on Vancouver Island who will bring their children out when ours are there. We realize that's not what the government wants but... We want to hear back from (Health Minister) Mr. (Peter) Dueck in a week. Not just for this year but for the future. We have a way to get to Victoria and we will come..."

Robertson said.

She said a local party has donated the use of a private jet to transport the parents and their children to Victoria.

The meeting followed the recent announcement of the Health Ministry's budget of \$198,500 for the centre which is run by the Cerebral Palsy Association of Prince George.

The association had asked the government for \$400,000 in order to properly meet the needs of the 300 children who receive services each year as well as another 300 children who are on a waiting list.

The board then said it would be forced to reduce services unless more money was received.

Last week, parents gathered together to voice their concerns and decided to take their case, and their children, to Victoria to press the government for more money.

Van Rheenen said they came to listen — and that's what they did for two hours.

Parents raised concerns about how the lack of government funds for the centre meant their children were not able to receive the therapy required, and how additional stress of worrying about the possible closure or reduction in services at the centre caused problems to already "stressed out" parents.

Lorraine Gunn, whose daughter has been receiving services at the centre for about 2½ years, said one of the biggest concerns parents have is that "the way the government funds the centre is really the bottom line to staff problems, stress problems, therapy problems... it all stems from the type of funding we have here."

Therapy staff, many looking for

jobs elsewhere, related how they could find work anywhere due to a shortage of specialists in their fields and how it is difficult to work at 1987 wage levels when their counterparts were making more money.

"A couple of children were hit on bicycles here recently... it (being a special needs child) can happen to any child," said a member of the audience.

Both government officials were in Prince George to meet with parents about three years ago, said one Quesnel mother who said "it's incredible to me we have to come here year after year and explain our problems to you."

Van Rheenen said the government's budget process is an annual one and that the meetings three years ago helped gather information for the government which resulted in increases for child development centres around the province.

"You don't have to prove that therapy works or is necessary for your kids," he said, adding that "the situation is different than it was described two years ago," referring to the size of the waiting list.

He said the situation also differs because the centre is now used as a regional facility and that the types of therapy children are needing seem to have become more complex.

"The centre has expanded its services and we're looking at the amount we pay for versus the amount of services at the centre today," he said.

A member of the Foster Parents Association said the association backs the centre's demand for more government money.

"The government is asking if we have what it takes to be foster parents. With centres like this yes, but without it, no."

A second member of the association said government ministries have to learn to work better together to finance these centres.

He said as foster parents, often three government ministries deal with one child at the same time and it is "sad a child has to become a foster child before he gets the services he requires in his own home."

Van Rheenen said the concerns would be conveyed in Victoria.

"You will hear back but I can't commit to a time frame," he said.

"There should be no question in your mind that we are aware of the seriousness of what you're talking about. You have been effective in conveying the real thoughts you have. We came to listen and be assured we heard you."

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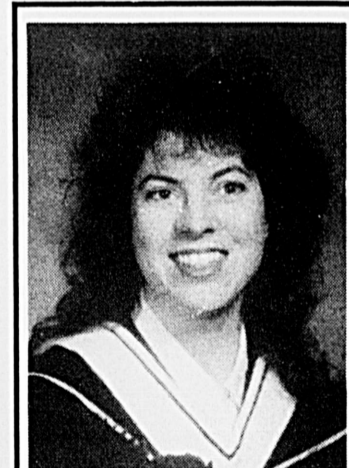
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