

PGRH not filling role as a regional facility

By SHANE MILLS

Prince George Free Press

Ken Last sums up the problem at Prince George Regional Hospital succinctly. "These people are here (in the North) by choice. They work hard in a dangerous occupation. They're paid well and are paying their fair share of taxes. They're entitled to get their fair share of health care," says the administrator of G.R. Baker Hospital in Quesnel.

His concerns over PGRH's ability to properly serve the North are echoed by counterparts in Vanderhoof and Burns Lake.

The shortage of orthopedic and obstetric specialists is a prime worry. "That's where the difficulties are," says Terry Smith of Burns Lake. He notes medical staff is sending patients to Vancouver and even Alberta but adds "the first point of reference would still be Prince George."

At St. John in Vanderhoof, Ben Gumm says the problem is simple: "trying to get patients transferred." He says the lack of specialists on-call is causing frustration for doctors. "They're tied up

for hours, making phone calls. It's very frustrating."

In Quesnel, Mr. Last says patients are sent to Kamloops or Vancouver. "It costs more if the patient has to be evacked and it's not really Closer to Home."

His other major concern is the lack of psychiatric beds at PGRH. "It's been a real problem. We can't keep them legally." Vanderhoof has the same problem, but in Burns Lake Mr. Smith says the problem isn't as bad because patients can be transferred to Terrace.

But the executive director of PGRH says the hospital is working through some difficult times. "We've gone through a great deal of change in the past two years," says Dennis Cleaver. "The rapid change has left a number of people uncertain as to where they're at with the hospital."

The hospital is moving to assuage concerns by getting out in the community and explaining the changes. In fact, Mr. Cleaver predicts "as life unfolds we will enhance our regional role."

Acknowledging there is a

shortage in the areas of orthopedics and obstetrics, Mr. Cleaver says PGRH is actively recruiting to fill these roles. In terms of other specialists, he argues the numbers are continuing to grow gradually.

PGRH has 209 acute care beds, which Mr. Cleaver says is "sufficient" except for the fact between 15 to 20 of the beds are being used by patients waiting transfer to long-term care beds. "It can be," admits Mr. Cleaver, "difficult on certain days" to find available space.

As well, he notes there will be 10 more psychiatric beds coming on stream in the spring.

"We have gone through a vast amount of change and there is always some difficulties, we will work through these difficulties."

Helping PGRH through the transition will be an infusion of \$3.9 million. Mr. Cleaver says \$2.1 million will go towards base funding for the hospital, while the remaining \$1.8 million will be used for new initiatives.

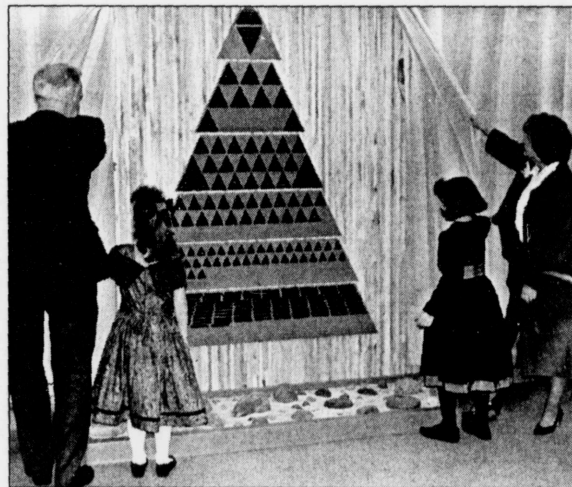
Hospital says thanks to donors

The Prince George Regional Hospital Foundation has given its supporters a big 'thank you.'

The Foundation unveiled its "Cycle of Giving Donor Wall" Thursday night and anyone who's donated \$1,000 or more had his or her name engraved on a plaque sitting on the wall in the PGRH lobby. The display is in the shape of a fir tree and the top level is for the only two donors who've given \$500,000 or more - the hospital auxiliary and the Shriners/CKPG Telethon. The auxiliary has actually given more than \$2-million over the last 75 years, and the Shriners have promised \$500,000 from telethon proceeds over a five-year period.

The Foundation will defray the costs of the wall by selling 100 signed limited prints of a painting by Randy Adams featuring the native-style mask on the donor wall. The prints will sell for about \$100 each.

The Foundation currently has a 'capital campaign' underway, started in November of 1993 and \$3.72-million has been raised through that so far. The goal is \$5 million and it will be used to pay for a pediatric ward (\$500,000), a magnetic resonance imaging machine (\$1.8 million), the jubilee lodge extended care development (\$1 million), diagnostic services including a gamma camera, a new radio graphic fluoroscopy room that will show moving images of the body at work (\$1.2 million), and for endowment funds to provide ongoing professional education, educational bursaries and future equipment needs (\$500,000).



Hospital board chair Lorraine Grant, along with daughters Caylee and Nicole, and Jack McKenzie, chair of the capital campaign, unveil the donor wall. DAVID HEYMAN/FREE PRESS

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