

Effort to open hospice in city could fall through by Friday

BY RORY MACLEAN, THE STARPHOENIX SEPTEMBER 26, 2011



Deborah Black is part of a group trying to establish a hospice on Queen street across from City Hospital.

Photograph by: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix, The StarPhoenix

A group has formed to open Saskatoon's first hospice, but if it fails to raise enough funds by Friday its bid on the ideal building could fall through.

The Prairie Hospice Society, a loose group composed of health-care providers and other interested residents, has talked about creating some form of hospice in Saskatoon for years, whether it's in-home care, community outreach or an actual live-in facility.

"For years people have been saying we need hospice care in Saskatoon," said Deborah Black, spokesperson for the Prairie Hospice Society.

St. Paul's hospital currently offers palliative care, but Black said this is problematic because most people who are dying don't actually require medical intervention, though they may end up in such an acute care setting.

"Most people would prefer to die in their home."

When the nearly 100-year-old Bethany Home, located on Queen Street across from City Hospital, came up for sale recently, they saw it as the ideal facility.

Bethany Home was originally a hospital before being used as a home for unwed mothers. It's currently a home for troubled girls run by the Salvation Army.

A smaller facility is being constructed by the Salvation Army in Sutherland, so the Bethany House is up for grabs.

With the significant renovations needed to repair the building and address accessibility issues, the group estimates the cost at around \$2 million.

Affinity Credit Union can help cover 90 per cent through a mortgage, but the group has to raise 10 per cent by the time the bid closes on Friday to secure the loan.

The only hospice facility in the province is currently in Regina, the Regina Wascana Grace Hospice.

"Up until they opened one in Regina...Saskatchewan, as a province, and Newfoundland and Labrador were the only two provinces that did not have one," said Dr. Phil Carverhill, the psychologist involved in the hospice society.

"Saskatoon is one of the only reasonably sized cities in the country that doesn't have one."

A hospice would address people's desire to die with dignity, in their home or outside of an acute-care institution.

Carverhill said 80 to 90 per cent of people in Canada die in an institution, depending on the numbers you're looking at.

There is a palliative care unit at St. Paul's Hospital, but even with that unit there are still many dying in acute care units and "places that are not geared for people who are dying," said Carverhill.

"They are geared for curative needs."

Acute-care units lack the focus on pain management, and psychological and spiritual counselling that hospice care includes, he said.

"It's missing a whole sort of esthetic. There are lots of machines around and it's a busy place, not very quiet or peaceful. It's not set up for family members or friends to stay overnight if that should be part of the need of the person who's dying. It's not family or support-person friendly," said Carverhill.

"Just this past week a client related to me the difficult circumstances of watching her spouse die in an acute care bed. This happened on a weekend where admission to the palliative care unit was not possible."

The Prairie Hospice Society is hoping the community will come together over their cause and donate before Friday. People can donate through their website, prairiehospice.org.

Black would like to see some support from the Saskatoon Health Region, too.

"It would be wonderful if there was support from the health region," said Black, "but the provincial government does not have it as a priority; they don't foresee a need for hospice care in the city for quite some time. We think they're wrong."

Statistics Canada predicted in 2004 that the rate of deaths in Canada will increase 33 per cent by the year 2020 to more than 330,000 deaths per year.

Canadians of any age may require hospice care, but no doubt Saskatchewan - with its older farm communities - will need to address the end-of-life needs of its growing elderly population in the coming years, said Black.

Even if the group fails to raise enough money for the bid, "we're still moving forward," he said.

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