



# Overcrowding puts lives at risk

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## The Okanagan Saturday

Hospital overcrowding has potentially fatal consequences. It's not just a matter of discomfort and indignity.

Health professionals are raising the alarm because we need to care for all patients thoroughly and quickly. But when a hospital is regularly forced to admit up to 29 percent more patients than capacity - 44 more than the 148 beds at Vernon Jubilee - lives are at stake. Surgeries are cancelled.

The people of Vernon deserve better.

The Health Sciences Association applauds the health professionals at VJH who have been speaking out with the Purple Ribbon campaign for more beds. And we applaud the City of Vernon for its unanimous vote last week to support the campaign.

Many doctors and health professionals agree that the acute bed shortage is partially caused by a lack of long-term care and other community supports. When HSA's representatives met with the new minister of health last month, we described an innovative program that is already working at VJH to reduce congestion: the integrated care program.

This program uses a multi-disciplinary team to manage the transition of complex-care patients back into the community; it is proving very effective, and the program is spreading to other areas in Interior Health. It helps move patients out of the hospital more quickly, and into a community care situation with the supportive services they need. A team of physiotherapists, dietitians, occupational therapists, social workers, respiratory therapists, long-term case managers and community family physicians is working together in this project that both improves care and cuts treatment costs.

HSA is the union that represents more than 16,000 health professionals working in B.C.'s hospitals and health centres. Currently, our members are pushed beyond the brink - and distressed that patients at Vernon Jubilee may not be receiving the level of care they deserve.

We urge the Interior Health Authority and Health Minister Michael de Jong to address this dangerous situation with strategic, long-term solutions that will improve the lives of all Vernon residents.

Reid Johnson, President  
Health Sciences Association of B.C.

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