

## **Dramatic shift in medical care**

Times Colonist (Victoria)

13-Mar-2011

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By Editorial

The Royal Jubilee Patient Care Centre opens its doors today. The new building will replace all 400 existing beds at the Royal Jubilee site, and add 120 more.

Built at a cost of \$300 million, the award-winning hospital represents a dramatic shift in medical thinking.

There are no surgical suites, pathology labs or diagnostic facilities. These are next door, in an adjacent building.

The Patient Care Centre doesn't treat patients or diagnose them or operate on them. It simply cares for them.

That might sound like a truism. Don't all hospitals care for their patients? Not like this one.

More than 80 per cent of the beds are in private rooms. Each has its own toilet and bath.

The rooms are equipped with guide rails and hoists to let frail patients get about. And so-called "smart beds" can be programmed to summon a nurse, if patients at risk of falling get to their feet.

There is an aboriginal healing chamber, where traditional native rites can be performed.

The theory is as simple as it is revolutionary. Patients are not just biological units in need of repair. They are human beings who respond to their surroundings.

Until very recently, hospital designers discounted this fact. They built crowded wards that ignored the need for privacy. They cut patients off from loved ones.

They installed an industrial-style treatment system that actually impedes recovery. In short, they catered to disease, and forgot the human soul.

Little wonder that one critic labelled such facilities "built catastrophes, anonymous institutional complexes . totally unfit for the purpose they have been designed for."

The care centre is a fresh start. By employing a more humanized approach, project managers believe they can improve recovery times 20 per cent.

And they mean to get serious about infection control. Since the days of Florence Nightingale, hospital designers have struggled with an inescapable fact -bring a lot of sick people together, and you give germs a field day.

The use of private rooms will go some way to reducing that concern. But studies show the best way to combat hospital-based infections is untiring attention to cleanliness.

The new facility incorporates a number of sanitary techniques, but the most important is the oldest. There are hand-washing stations throughout the building, and in every patient room.

Yet physicians and nurses are busy people, and busy people forget. So patients will be asked to check that everyone who visits them washes their hands on entering.

One quibble. As a name, Patient Care Centre lacks the human touch. Some health agencies in Canada have made millions selling naming rights to facilities.

A commercial transaction seems wrong here. But surely there is a local benefactor, or luminary in the medical field, whose name could be borrowed.

Or what about a patient who showed exceptional courage? Young Eva Markvoort from New Westminster, who died last year of cystic fibrosis, won international praise for her fight against the disease.

In any case, we have something here to be proud of. The new facility will make an outstanding contribution to the health and wellness of our community. Congratulations to everyone who worked on it.