Patients will suffer if blood services move: doctors

■ During Horizon Health Network's monthly board meeting last night, members discussed dangers of relocating essential service

BY BRUCE BARTLETT
CANADAEAST NEWS SERVICE

SAINT JOHN — Patients will suffer, and costs to New Brunswick hospitals will rise, if Canadian Blood Services closes its production centre in Saint John and moves to Dartmouth, the board of Horizon Health Network, formerly known as Health Region B, was told at its monthly meeting in Saint John yesterday.

Blood Services has not provided any information on how closing the production centre in Saint John will save money, said Dr. James Flick, of the department of laboratory hematology & transfusion medicine at the Saint John Regional Hospital.

Blood specialist Dr. Terry Comeau also warned of rising costs for drugs when blood products are not available.

But like any other major blood production company in the world, Canadian Blood Services is trying to cut costs, Flick said.

"The problem is that it is not obvious, necessarily to us, unless we look very carefully at the proposals to find out just exactly what it is going to cost us," he said.

The danger to patients of moving blood production out of the province is that platelets, the part of the blood that allows it to clot and keeps patients from developing unstoppable bleeding, can not be refrigerated and only last five days, declining in efficiency the older they get.

"We have to be really careful that when we get a proposal that we know exactly what we are getting into because it may not be as simple, it may be a lot more expensive than we are told," he said.

Comeau told of his experience working in an area in the U.S. that did not have its own blood production service.

When platelets were not available doctors had to use drugs costing $10,000 a dose to stop patients from bleeding out and it was not unheard of to use $500,000 of the drug in a weekend, he said.

If blood production for New Brunswick is handled in Nova Scotia there will be times when hospitals in both provinces will need products fast, Flick said.

"It will be much better if we can maintain access to our own supply," he said. "The question I have is: why fix something when it isn't broken?"

Blood Services has said one of the reasons for centralizing production in Dartmouth is to improve the blood supply by including a treatment phase to remove all bacteria and viruses from platelets and plasma — known as pathogen reduction.

Flick is in favour of adding this process to blood treatment because it means pathogens that doctors don't even know about will be removed from the blood products. It is currently done in Europe but not in the U.S. or Canada.

Flick, who has spoken to colleagues in Europe, said the current technology for pathogen reduction doesn't allow for any cost reductions because it cannot be done in bulk. Each unit of blood that is treated requires one machine.

"You can't scale this thing up because you have to use one machine for each unit," he said. "If you want to double the volume you have to double the number of machines."

So adding pathogen reduction to the blood supply could be done in New Brunswick for the same cost as it could in Nova Scotia, and in fact Blood Services has promised Newfoundland to provide the equipment in that province, he said.

Dieppe councillor draws harsh words

■ Mayor Jean LeBlanc suggested Jean Gaudet should consider resigning from committee post

BY YVON GAUVIN
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

Well-meaning or not, Dieppe City Councillor Jean Gaudet was given a proper dressing down at last night's regular council meeting for going too far in the promotion of French on commercial signage in the city.

Gaudet drew the ire of Mayor Jean LeBlanc for introducing a motion in council calling on all merchants and businesses to utilize both official languages when dealing with the public.

The motion was that a letter on behalf of the mayor be sent to businesses asking owners and managers to "recognize and respect" French, the language of the majority of Dieppe residents, in all facets of their business operations.

Gaudet is the president of the Dieppe Comité de la promotion du français et du patrimoine, which has been a major player in promoting the French language in the municipality for a number of years.

Gaudet said after the council meeting that letters have been sent to merchants promoting French in the past and that it needed to be done soon with the important holiday shopping season just around the corner.

LeBlanc didn't see it quite that way.

The mayor pointed out that a separate committee has been working for 10 months to establish policies and strategies with a final report expected soon.

He said it was disrespectful as well as self-serving of Gaudet to take the action he did and suggested it was perhaps time for Gaudet to resign as president of the committee.

Gaudet disagreed with the mayor's comments and said afterwards he was surprised by the criticism and subsequent action of council.

The motion by Gaudet was seconded by Roger LeBlanc and immediately afterwards an amendment to table the motion for further consideration was moved by Councillor Dave Maltais, also seconded by Roger LeBlanc.

That prompted a procedural check after Deputy Mayor Paul LeBlanc wondered if it was proper for the same councillor to support what seems to be opposite actions.

Mayor LeBlanc allowed the seconder, saying the two motions were separate actions and not opposing views.

The vote to table the motion was passed with four councillors in favour and Gaudet the lone nay vote.

Mayor LeBlanc said after the meeting that he stands by what he said and he added there was no personal animosity between the councillor and himself or council and that everyone works well together.

Council members can disagree at times, he said.

The language debate is important for Dieppe, which prides itself as the biggest Acadian city and "urban capital" of Acadie, said the mayor, adding it also prides itself as a bilingual city. It's a question of identity, he said.

The final report by the language committee will be heard and debated before a public meeting of council before any decisions are taken, LeBlanc added.

Earlier in the meeting, Josée Nadeau reported to council on the P.R.O. Jeunesse program, which raises money to help youngsters participate in organized sporting events.

Council approved a tender bid from J. K. Fraser and Son Ltd. for phase one of site preparation work at the St. Anselme Rotary Park for a recreation area for persons 55 years and older. The tender was for $42,782.30, with the total cast of phase one estimated at $150,000. A similar amount will be spent next year for the second and final phase of work.

Man sent to jail for domestic violence

A Moncton judge sentenced a man to four months in jail yesterday after he admitted to beating his girlfriend while she held their infant son.

Jamie Joseph Vautour, 25, was in Moncton domestic violence court for sentencing yesterday after earlier pleading guilty to assaulting Chantal Landry and breaching a probation order.

He's been in custody since his arrest two weeks ago.

The incident occurred at a residence in Lakeville on Oct. 17. Crown prosecutor Jessica Lavoie said Vautour slapped Landry in the face and then punched her with a closed fist, though Vautour denied he used a fist on the second blow. Lavoie said he then pushed her and blocked the doorway.

"These events occurred as she was holding a six-week-old baby in her arms," said the Crown.

Lavoie said the victim's face was bruised and swollen as a result of the attack and she stayed away from friends and family because she didn't want to be seen.

"She was really embarrassed and ashamed because of what happened," said Lavoie, who asked for a six- to nine-month sentence.

Defence lawyer Martin Goguen told the court his client was very remorseful for his actions.

The defendant, who said he was intoxicated at the time, read a letter to the court and apologized to his ex-girlfriend and her family, some of whom were present in the court with her.

Vautour said while the relationship is over because of his actions, he still wants to play a role in his son's life.

Goguen requested a four- to five-month jail term, which Judge Brigitte Sivret followed. She sentenced him to four months on top of the two weeks he's already served in custody and placed him on probation for 18 months. He'll be under several conditions during that time such as following a domestic violence program, abstaining from alcohol and drugs and following a firearms ban.

He is also banned from initiating any contact with the woman during the probation period and any contact regarding their son must be made through a third party.

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