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“It’s like you’re waiting for a place to go . . . and it’s just not happening. She wants to have a place to call her own.”

Home in the hospital

With a long-term care bed crisis that’s among the worst in the country, more and more seniors are forced to wait it out in the hospital

BY GORD YOUNG
THE NUGGET

Rachel Semeniuk calls a semi-private room at North Bay and District Hospital home.

But what she really wants is a place to call her own.

The elderly woman is a casualty of the acute-care bed crisis that has for years bogged down the local health-care system, causing an overflow of patients at area hospitals.

“It has been a long process, not only for her but also for myself,” said the woman’s daughter Jessie Zolov, her only family.

Semeniuk has spent the past year in the hospital awaiting placement in an area nursing home.

And while her daughter has no complaints about the care she receives from the nurses at the hospital, Zolov said the two are looking forward to settling into a permanent home. But there’s no telling when that may happen.

“It’s like you’re waiting for a place to go . . . and it’s just not happening,” said Zolov. “She wants to have a place to call her own.”

Semeniuk is an alternate level of care patient — someone who should be in a nursing home, but is forced to remain in hospital because there aren’t enough beds.

It’s a problem the North Bay hospital hopes to address through the creation of a task force that will look at how to stave off the deluge of frail and elderly patients at area hospitals.

Hospital board chairman Alain Perron said this week the “alternate level of care” problem in this area is among the worst in the country. And he said the task force, consisting of area hospitals, long-term care facilities and other agencies affected by the bed crisis, will look for local solutions.

“This isn’t only a North Bay General Hospital problem . . . It’s a community problem,” said Perron, noting the hospital can’t tackle the issue on its own.

An average of 30 per cent of the hospital’s beds are occupied on any given day with patients awaiting placement in nursing homes. And some will wait months, taxing valuable hospital resources, until a long-term care bed becomes available.

“There’s a ripple effect because of that,” said Perron, noting the bed crisis often leads to longer emergency room wait times and other delays.

Please see
PROGRAMS/A3



Jessie Zolov visits her mother, Rachel Semeniuk, at the North Bay and District Hospital on a daily basis. Semeniuk has lived at the hospital for the past year, awaiting placement in an area nursing home.

GORD YOUNG, THE NUGGET

Scollard site could help ease shortage

BY GORD YOUNG
THE NUGGET

The North Bay and District Hospital’s Scollard site should be used to help address this area’s acute-care bed crisis once the construction of the new health centre is completed, says East Ferris Mayor Bill Vrebosch.

“People expect it to be used,” said Vrebosch, noting the millions of tax dollars that have been poured into the building since its construction shouldn’t go to waste.

With little more than a year before the completion of the North Bay Regional Health Centre, Vrebosch said serious consideration should be given to housing the overflow of patients awaiting placement in nursing homes at the Scollard site.

A long-standing problem throughout the province, the alternate level of care problem has led to surgical cancellations and emergency room delays at many hospitals over the past several years.

The issue has reached a breaking point in Sudbury, where surgeons have banded together to demand action and a task force is tackling the problem.

Please see
CLOCK/A3



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Clock ticking on study

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And this area is following suit by creating its own task force to help cut down on the estimated 30 per cent of acute-care hospital beds occupied by patients who should be in a nursing home.

"I've been told we're facing a crisis," said Vrebosch, who has recently encountered the problem first hand.

Vrebosch said his ailing father had to be kept in a Toronto hospital for several additional days during a recent stay because there weren't any available beds in North Bay.

Alain Perron, board chairman at North Bay and District Hospital, said it's possible the use of the Scollard site could be a part of the alternate level of care solution. But he said the building has to be evaluated to determine if it's suitable.

Perron said the hospital board has asked both the health ministry and Northeast Local Health Integration Network to fund such a study, although the board has not yet received a response.

"North Bay General Hospital is not in the business of operating long-term care facilities," said Perron, noting it would take another agency to step forward to run the Scol-



Patients at North Bay and District Hospital are often pushed into the hallways due to a shortage of beds for those awaiting placement in a nursing home.

GORD YOUNG, THE NUGGET

lard site if it was deemed a viable solution.

The hospital has formed a committee to look at what to do with the Scollard and McLaren sites and other properties when the new health centre is completed.

But with the new health centre less than two years from completion, Vrebosch said a study should be underway if the Scollard site is to be seriously considered as a solution.

"If nothing is being done... it needs to get done," he said.

Remy Beaudoin, chief executive officer of the health network, agreed the Scollard site is an option, pending a

study. But he said there may be suitable sites elsewhere.

Beaudoin said it's too early to focus strictly on the Scollard site as a solution, suggesting the task force being formed by the hospital board will likely consider that along with other avenues.

Although she hasn't been directly involved, Nipissing MPP Monique Smith said she's aware that the former hospital site is something that's being considered.

But she agreed the location needs to be studied, suggesting retrofitting the former hospital may not be cost effective.

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Programs haven't helped problem

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Perron said the Northeast Local Health Integration Network unveiled a plan in 2007 aimed at reducing the ratio of alternate level of care patients by 25 per cent annually over several years. But he said the problem has since grown by another 10 per cent.

"We're going in the wrong direction," he said, suggesting the crisis will only worsen given an aging population.

Perron said greater capacity within the local health-care system needs to be at least part of the solution.

Dave Mendicino, a city councillor and board chairman at Cassellholme Home for the Aged, said there are 503 people in the region who are either at home or in hospital awaiting a nursing home bed. And he said 122 of those people want to be placed at Cassellholme.

Mendicino acknowledged the province has an Aging at Home program to provide seniors with more access to home care to help keep them out of hospital beds. And he said Cassellholme is set to break ground this year on a project to build 55 new supportive housing units that will provide some relief.

Remy Beaudoin, chief executive officer of the health integration network, doesn't disagree with increasing capaci-

ty to address the problem.

But he said a study conducted by the network that profiled alternate level of care patients indicates additional supportive housing within the system would be a better solution than long-term care beds. He said supportive housing is also less expensive for the system.

"We will be a part of the task force as it unfolds," said Beaudoin.

He said the system hasn't yet realized the full benefits of the Aging at Home strategy and other programs launched by the network because they're still in their infancy. And Beaudoin said each institution needs to ensure it's maximizing its resources.

Nipissing MPP Monique Smith agreed the problem needs to be addressed from a variety of directions. She applauded the move to create a task force, suggesting the best way to find solutions that will work is co-operation among all those involved.

Smith said increasing capacity is something the province is looking at, but noted that's a long-term solution to an immediate problem. She pointed to the Aging at Home program, suggesting it's part of the short-term solution.

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