

# City faces shortage of doctors

JUN 28, 1989

By Pamela den Ouden, Northerner Staff Writer

With two of Fort St. John's doctors leaving this summer and a third presumed dead after a plane crash, the city is facing a shortage of doctors that has the medical community worried.

"We are definitely under-doctored," said Dr. Art Cain, speaking on behalf of the General Hospital chief of staff. "And that's not even considering the impending departures."

Dr. Michael Kobic, the city's only internist, and Dr. Margaret Ormston, a general practitioner, will be gone by the end of the summer. Dr. Gary Westover, a general practitioner in the city for almost 30 years, is presumed to have died when his light plane crashed into the Peace River June 16.

According to Cain "there are no replacements in sight." He said it will be "very difficult" to replace them.

Assistant Administrator of the Medical Clinic Marilyn Campbell said "it almost seems an impossibility" to find a replacement for the specialist.

A medical spokesman, who asked to remain unidentified, said the remaining doctors will have to "work even harder. Anyone who says there isn't a shortage should try to make an appointment with a doctor. Ask anyone on the street if

(See DOCTOR, page 2)

He said the regional hospital district has about \$5,000 in its budget for the recruitment of regional specialists, such as a pathologist, whose discipline is of value to the whole region. Stewart said that these funds weren't in their budget five years ago, and "they certainly weren't there 15 years ago. We're willing to help, but we can't bear the whole burden."

He said there may be other strategies the provincial are both interested parties. He said

Fort St. John Hospital board chairman John Wezel agreed, adding that lack of contact with other professionals in a specialty and the lack of opportunity to upgrade skills also concerns Wezel said that recruiting is not the responsibility of the physicians, nor of the hospital, although they

specialists is that they need a population base sufficient to warrant their practice in an area.



# DOCTOR

(Continued from Page 1)

there is easy access to doctors. The answer will be 'no.' People don't like that.

"Or let them follow me around each day."

The spokesman said it was "almost impossible" to get Canadian doctors to work in the north, and although it is not terribly difficult to hire from outside the country, the process is tedious. "People often resent the fact that positions are filled by foreigners."

Traditionally, the doctors in the community have taken upon themselves the job of recruiting other physicians. They have entertained and interviewed at their own expense. Some have flown to university campuses in other cities to try to entice doctors in their last year of residency to come to Fort St. John to establish practices. With the shortage increasing, the question of whose responsibility recruitment is comes up.

"The physicians would like to see some mechanism in place that's going to be addressing the problem," said Cain. "We're not transferring the responsibility; we'll still be very much involved in determining the requirements and looking at a prospect." Cain said the doctors have looked to the hospital board as the pulse of the community, but know that it has no funding for recruiting. He said that it is in the community's best interests to have doctors and specialists; it cuts down on the expense and time of travelling to larger centres to receive treatment.

Moray Stewart, administrator of the Peace River Regional District, said doctor recruitment is an on-going problem. "It is extremely expensive. We have been very fortunate in having the private sector physicians take this upon themselves." He said the physicians "have done a valiant duty" in recruiting. "The only people who can recruit physicians are the physicians themselves; they're the only ones who can tell about the reality of practising in the area." But he said recruiting should be funded by the province.

"Health care is a provincial concern; this is a legitimate request to put to the provincial

government could put into play such as a differential fee schedule for doctors practising in the north. "We need an organized and concentrated approach; an ad hoc approach will not work."

Dave Pankratz, regional liaison officer for the northeast region said the provincial government recognises the recruitment and retention of professionals, including family physicians and specialists is a problem in northern communities. It has set up an interministerial committee of the ministries of health, social services, regional development and labour to address this problem. The provincial government already has a recruitment incentive grant program for health care students. Designed to attract health care professionals to more remote areas, it exchanges a \$5,000 annual grant for a commitment from the student to work one year at any location in the province designated by the Ministry of Health. Professions such as dental hygiene, psychology, nursing, audiology and physiotherapy are given priority. But he said the program has placed only a handful of professionals.

Pankratz said part of the answer is in "getting our message out there, telling them who and where we are. For those who want the great outdoor adventure, "this is the place. We have more species of ungulates here than anywhere in B.C.; there's great fishing. Kanuso Falls is 50' higher than Niagara, and above it, there are terraced falls and an alpine meadow, very fragile. Some people would give their eye teeth to have all that at their back door."

He admits that for others, amenities means "museums, libraries, the symphony" and those are the professionals who are hard to attract here.

Although financial incentives can help, there are other considerations. Dr. David Blair, president of the B.C. Medical Association said that doctors are "not so keen to work the same number of hours a week as doctors worked 10 or 20 years ago." He would like to see incentives other than fee schedules incentives such as support through relief help and time-off replacements. He said "lifestyle is very important."

Another problem in attracting specialists is that they need a

the hospital board "envisioning sharing the advertising costs; this would come out of discretionary funds, it is not part of hospital funding."

Ben Knutson, chairman of the Regional District said that it would be worthwhile discussing the question of recruitment at the regional board level and try to come up with an answer. "Everyone wants to live in the promised land where all the amenities are and

where the winters are not quite so long." He said that financial gain was probably the best way to attract doctors to the area.

"The universality we have sometimes makes it difficult to get anything done. Part of the problem is people don't really understand our area. They still think it's an area of perpetual ice and snow, where we eat moosemeat and bannock."

Fort St. John mayor Pat Walsh said "a shortage has not been

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blem, it would be identified to us  
the hospital board." He said the  
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added that "recruiting is not the  
y's financial obligation" but the  
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# (7) Plane crash kills doctor

TRND 1990

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Dr. Westover has been a physician practicing in Fort St. John for the past 32 years. He has accumulated over 25 years of local bush flying experience. The aircraft he was piloting was a home-built amphibious bi-plane. Over 2,032 hours were spent constructing the Sea Hawk aircraft, of which there are 200 registered. The Ministry of Transport physically inspected and approved each phase of construction. Dr. Westover was in the final phase of flight testing the aircraft.

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Dr. Westover's damaged aircraft was spotted submerged in the Peace River at 6:30 p.m. Frank Moynahan arranged for a helicopter from the airport to recover the fuselage at 8:30 p.m. Evidence suggested a manual release of the pilot safety harness. Optimism of Dr. Westover's survival at this time was high. If he survived the accident and made it to shore, his considerable bush experience would have been valuable.

Volunteer searchers were at the scene by 8:30 p.m. with riverboats

beginning to search shortly after midnight. Air visualization of the wreckage estimated the impact site to be about seven miles upstream from where the fuselage was found.

O'Brian Blackall contacted federal air rescue and co-ordinated local air search. He also contacted BC Hydro, which initiated the lowering of the river water level.

Through efforts of the search and rescue team, the R.C.M.P., ground searchmaster Mark Gibb and volunteer riverboat crews, a co-ordinated search began the following morning. The search involved numerous resources, including rotary and fixed wing aircraft, riverboats and search dogs. Volunteer support was outstanding. Over 500 people contacted the Westover family to provide whatever support they could.

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# Tension apparent with hospital sides

By Linda White  
Daily News special

With the nurses' strike escalating, tensions are mounting on both sides, and a number of complaints by doctors regarding actions taken by the nurses' union are emerging throughout the province.

Such is the case in Dawson Creek. Radiologist Dr. Reg Gojmerac says that some nurses on the picket line "have been giving patients who

come to the hospital for tests misleading information."

He says that on Thursday "some picketing nurses were intercepting people in the parking lot and asking them what they were coming for. In one case in particular, the people were advised that their tests were not necessary."

He says that when the people did not show up for these tests, they had to be contacted by the hospital at home and asked to come in.

"These were isolated incidents," Gojmerac says, "but it indicates some interference by the nurses, and was inappropriate advice to be giving."

He says the hospital administration in Dawson Creek filed a complaint with the HLRA to reprimand the act of these few individuals.

Dr. Gojmerac adds that this is not at all the problem at the Fort St. John hospital, where, he says, the "action by the nurses has been admirable." Gojmerac is a radiologist at both hospitals.

Nurses interviewed on the Fort St. John picket line say that they have been talking with and answering questions of those people who ask and they have been distributing literature on the picket line to inform passers-by about the wage demands they are making. The handout is printed by the BCNU.

While the picket lines may look intimidating, nurses here say that no patient is really hesitant to cross them, "although some of them apologize as they do." Technicians are also reporting for work at the hospital.

Neither the nurses nor the Fort St. John hospital have received complaints regarding the nurses' 24-hour picket lines.

Both the workers in the hospital and the striking nurses say that one big problem is the public misconceptions about the strike.

The complaint of doctors is that "the public does not understand that the hospitals are not shut down," Gojmerac says. "The public should be aware that facilities are operating as normal for tests and examinations that are necessary or urgent, although they should expect to wait a while."

Nurses say their major complaint is that the public does not understand fully the details of their

## OBITUARIES

### Dr. Gary Groves Westover

Dr. Gary Groves Westover, who practiced medicine in the North Peace for more than three decades, was lost to his family and community June 16 in the crash of his light plane in the Peace River.

Gary Groves Westover was born on December 4, 1929, in Calgary, spending his early school years in Red Deer and Fort Saskatchewan. He graduated in 1955 from the University of Alberta School of Medicine in Edmonton, Alberta. Anticipating general practice in a small community which would require a broader range of medical skills, he completed an extra year's internship at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. In 1957, with colleague and friend Dr. Keith Dixon, he moved to Fort St. John. He would have completed 32 years of general practice in the Peace Country on June 30 this year.

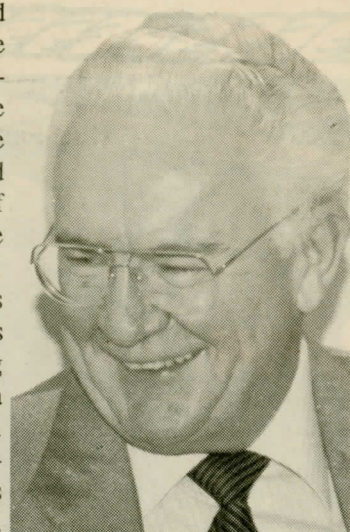
Gary Westover enjoyed his work and his many hobbies. His library was extensive, as reading in his area of interest was a favorite pastime. He was a devoted and much loved husband, father and grandfather; his grandchildren were a joy to him. He loved gardening and enjoyed his prize flowers and vegetables which he often entered in the Fall Fair.

Gary was an ardent outdoorsman: fishing, hunting, boating, skiing were favourite sports, and he was also a registered falconer. Gary Westover was much respected by the community. He especially enjoyed association with his local flying fraternity, river boaters, fellow Rotarians and many friends.

For more than 25 years his most absorbing part-time interest was flying. Through the years he crossed Canada twice, flew as far north as Tuktoyaktuk, south as far as Mexico. Four years ago, he began to work on an amphibious biplane, a Seahawk. He proudly put the finishing touches on the plane in mid-June, and was in the process of completing the final required test flights. On June 16, his plane went down.

Surviving are his wife Simona; mother Irene Groves Westover; son Dr. Christopher and wife Charlene, and their children Michael and Rachele; son Gordon; son Robert and wife Kellie; son Dr. Ted and wife Patty; daughters Susan and Theresa; daughter Heather and husband Glen Merwin and their children Ashley, Britney, and Harrison. Gary Westover will be sadly missed by family and his many friends.

A remembrance service will be held at the Peace Lutheran Church on Wednesday, June 28, at 2 p.m. In lieu of flowers, friends are asked to contribute to the Dr. Westover Memorial Fund, which will provide for an educational bursary.



## Search continues

By Linda White  
Daily News special

A volunteer search has been organized by the Fort St. John Search Centre this weekend in a final effort to look for Dr. Gary Westover, who went missing last weekend when his plane crashed in the Peace River.

Mark Gibb, the local Search Master estimates that over 70 volunteers turned up at a meeting last night to co-ordinate the search effort.

Gibb says a number of boats and planes will be available for the search, which will extend from the area where the plane went down, to as far as Peace River, Alberta. As well, ground searchers will comb the banks along the river in an effort to find some evidence that may have washed onto a gravel bar or beaver dam.

Gibb says the search team has asked B.C. Hydro to reduce the level of the river this weekend in an effort to aid the search, as it "may reveal something on the banks of the river."

Volunteers will begin the search at 9 a.m. Saturday morning and are expected to report back to the Search Centre by 7 p.m. The search will again resume on Sunday.

Gibb says that if nothing turns up this weekend, then most likely "the search will not continue." He adds, though, that "the Centre will advise the public, the people who use the river, that there is a man missing and that any information would be appreciated by his family."

This search is an entirely volunteer effort, with most of the equipment supplied by the Search



# Family continues search for Dr. Westover

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following morning. The search involved numerous resources, including rotary and fixed wing aircraft, riverboats and search dogs. Volunteer support was outstanding. Over 500 people contacted the Westover family to provide whatever support they could.

Federal air search and rescue suspended their efforts after two

days, convinced the accident was non-survivable. Family and volunteers asked ground searchmaster Gibb to continue to co-ordinate a search and these efforts continued until Wednesday.

The Westover family has been overwhelmed by the support of the community volunteers and well-wishers but have come to realize any realistic hope of his survival are

News, Thursday, June 22, 1989 — 3

## Westover

gone.

The family will continue a search of the river this weekend (June 24-25). Any volunteers wishing to participate would be greatly appreciated. An organizational meeting to co-ordinate this search will be held at 7 p.m., Thursday, June 22 at the Legion library.

The Gary Westover Family

wage demands, and that i  
are distributing the hando

Centre. The fuel used by the boats  
has been donated by Doug Wiles.



JUNE 1989

# Search for missing doctor called off by federal rescue

By Kyle Storey  
Daily News staff

The search for a local pilot who crashed his amphibious plane in the Peace River Friday afternoon has officially been called off.

The search for Dr. Gary Westover, who crashed his homemade Sea-Hunter into the Peace River in the Bear Flats area, began Friday afternoon but was officially called off Sunday night.

While Dr. Westover has not been found, his aircraft was.

The case has now been turned over to the local detachment of the RCMP and will be treated as a missing persons case.

The Sea-Hunter is an amphibious aircraft with the propeller mounted behind the engine and uses the hull as the floatation device for landing on lakes and rivers.

The crash has been estimated to have occurred at approximately 2:30 p.m. Friday.

## TOTALLY DESTROYED

Phil Ablitt of the Canadian

Aviation Safety Board said the plane was totally destroyed.

The crash site showed no indications of the plane hitting trees or coming down in the valley. Inspections of the site indicate the plane crashed directly into the river.

"It looks like it just hit the water," said Ablitt. "If it was a landing attempt, it was one that was unsuccessful.

Ablitt refused to speculate on the cause of the accident but indicated it would appear, if it was a landing attempt, there was too much speed or the plane came in at the wrong angle.

"I'm still doing my investigation and I simply don't know enough yet to speculate," said Ablitt.

While no decision has yet been made on the cause of the crash, Ablitt said he had heard rumors Dr. Westover had planned to make some landings in the river.

No flight plan was filed with the local airport. Flight plans must be

filed for any flight over 25 miles.

Apparently Dr. Westover was planning to fly from Charlie Lake to the Fort St. John airport.

## LOWERED WATER LEVEL

B.C. Hyrdo aided in the recovery of the plane and in search and rescue by lowering the level of the Peace River.

The wreckage was removed from the crash site by Canadian Helicopters and the search involved local provincial emergency rescue personnel, the RCMP and the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Victoria.

Major Tom Mitchell of the Canadian Forces Base in Esquimalt and the office in charge of the Rescue Co-ordination Centre said the rescue operation was called off late Sunday evening and has been turned over to the RCMP to handle as a missing persons case.

"Basically we terminated our end of the search when we had exhausted all chance of finding survivors," said Major Mitchell. "If he survived the impact it would be difficult to survive the river. If he did survive the impact and did get to shore I'm sure we would have found him. He was an experienced woodsman and I'm sure he would have stayed near the plane."

Major Mitchell said it was "a very unusual case".

"Usually if we find the plane we find a survivor or a body nearby. I understand he was very popular and a large local effort was mounted to search. We really appreciate the help."

According to Major Mitchell, "at least five boats including an RCMP boat" and two civilian aircraft as well as a Canadian Forces Buffalo and numerous ground personnel were used in the search.

"It's very difficult when we have a case like this," said Major Mitchell. "We have a very popular local person missing and we found the plane but we couldn't find the body. I don't think there is any question he came to grief."

Major Mitchell indicated the plane was found some five miles downstream from where a wing was originally found and this may indicate part of the problem in finding the body.

55, Monday, June 19, 1989 -



1989

DECEMBER

# season of giving



DECEMBER 19, 1988

PAY TO THE ORDER OF

Fort St. John General Hospital

DOLLARS

100

**SEARS CANADA INC.**



Sears presented a \$2,400 cheque to the Fort St. John General Hospital on Monday as part of a fundraising project started in September which involved selling teddy bears. The adults in the picture are Sears district supervisor John Wells,

nurse Jean Jacobsen, Sears manager Kaye Hildebrand, hospital administrator Rick Wilson and Sears district manager Russ Bentley. The young patients are Jody Acko, Yvonne Mahoney and Crystel Andrusiak.



AUGUST 9, 1989

# Nurse shortage shuts hospital intensive care

A shortage of nurses at the Fort St. John General Hospital has forced closure of the intensive care unit and restrictions on surgery.

"We're in deep trouble for the next two weeks," assistant administrator Millie Asling told a meeting of the hospital board. We have no guarantee we can look after patients."

graduates from the nursing program at Northern Lights College may provide some relief and are more likely to remain in the area because they have family ties. Mrs. Asling said Fort St. John wasn't unique because all small hospitals are faced with similar recruiting and retention headaches.

and a full staff level may be accomplished by October. Trustees were told it's tough to offer incentives to attract nurses. Mrs. Asling noted that it is impractical to plan for incentives of any kind until the terms of the current contract negotiations are decided. Board Chairman John Wetzel said that exit interviews show that nurses are leaving the area to be closer to family, in some cases, or to improve their education.

Asling said the key problem is that Fort St. John doesn't attract experienced nurses. They come here to gain experience and then leave. She added that a lot of money had been spent on advertising across Canada to attract nurses but there was little response.

Trustee Noelle Jellison said

Mrs. Asling said seven full-time nursing positions are vacant. "We have had to restrict service due to a severe shortage of nurses."

The intensive care unit has been shut down for more than a week and some restrictions have been placed on surgery.

She added that only urgent surgery is being handled.

Dr. Geoffrey Birchall, chief of medical staff, said there were more patients than nurses or beds to accommodate them.

Mrs. Asling said part of the current problem is having nurses away

(See NURSES, page 2)

## NURSES

(Continued from Page 1)

on holidays and only a few casuals to fill in.

"The nurses have been doing their utmost to keep things covered and have worked overtime and on call-backs."

She said the difficulties aren't linked to the provincial labour dispute involving nurses but it's still one of the unknowns in the future which could impact on operations.

Last year the hospital was short four nurses and there was a turnover of about 50 per cent. Mrs. Asling said the situation is worse this year.

It's expected three nursing vacancies will be filled in the next month

Page 14 The Northerner Wednesday, August 16, 1989

## Tea planned to honor Dr. Margaret Ormston

A special tribute to Dr. Margaret Ormston, who leaves this month for a new home in the Lower Mainland, is being organized by Claire Harwood, acting nursing director of Ft. St. John General Hospital, and Rosemary Wheeler, physiotherapy department head, her long-time colleagues.

"This is our own way of showing our appreciation," said Harwood, "but this whole community is really going to miss her after 20 years of the kind of service she gave." They will host a tea in the doctor's honor at the hospital at 2 p.m. August 21.

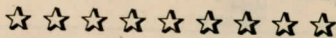
Both Wheeler and Harwood noted Ormston's many grateful patients, her care and kindness for elderly and disabled patients, and her readiness to go to people's homes when results, Davies says, of "pure joy".



# ACCIDENTS HURT EVERYBODY. ICBC

## The Annual General Meeting of the Fort St. John and District Hospital Society

will be held on  
**Monday, September 25, 1989**  
at  
**1930 Hours (7:30 p.m.)**  
in the  
**Assembly Hall**  
of the  
**Fort St. John General Hospital**



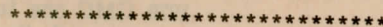
**PRESENT MEMBERS** in good standing may renew their memberships at any time prior to the commencement of the Annual Meeting.

**NEW MEMBERS**, or former members who again wish to join the Society, must be members of the Society for at least one month to be eligible to vote at the Annual Meeting.

**MEMBERSHIP COST: \$1.00**

Memberships may be obtained at the Fort St. John General Hospital Information Desk, daily between 0800 hours and 2000 hours (8 a.m. to 8 p.m.).

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# Wetzel still

## chairman

Daily News staff

John Wetzel has been re-elected to serve as chairman of the Fort St. John and District Hospital Society.

The election took place Monday Night at the society's annual general meeting.

Linda Gentles was elected vice-president, replacing Fred von Ilberg.

Hospital administrator Rick Wilson will remain as secretary-treasurer of the board, as per the society constitution.

Six people ran for positions on the board, prior to the election for the two executive positions.

Fred von Ilberg, Linda Gentles and Joan Hendrick were elected to three-year terms. Hugh Hodgkinson of Hudson's Hope was elected to a one-year term. Forty-two ballots were cast.

The other members of the board are John Wetzel, Roy Blackwood, Noelle Jellison, Fred Jarvis and John Skoreyko.

The trustees meet once a month to discuss hospital policies and finances. The meetings take place on the first Wednesday of the month.

# Hospital meeting tonight

Daily News staff

The Fort St. John and District Hospital Society will hold its annual general meeting tonight.

The meeting takes place at the hospital's assembly hall and begins at 7:30 p.m.

Reports will come from the chief of staff, Dr. Geoffrey Birchall; the chairman of the board, John Wetzel; the administrator, Rick Wilson; and the chairman of the auxiliary, Winona Davidson.

The financial report will be presented by the auditors.

Questions will be taken from the floor on any of the reports.

The meeting will conclude with an election of officers.

It's expected that one of the main topics of discussion will be the current shortage in the city of health care practitioners and the on-going battle to recruit specialists.

The hospital was established in 1931 and was originally run by the Sisters of Providence. The new building was completed in 1962.

According to Daily News file statistics, there are 96 beds at the facility: 41 medical and surgery, 21 pediatrics, 20 maternity, three intensive care and 11 extended care.





Rosemary Wheeler checks over Tina Elias-Bertim's sprained ankle

## 'Part of our job is to inspire'

Rosemary Wheeler, director of rehabilitation medicine at the Fort St. John General Hospital, is leaving the area on Oct. 10 after almost 30 years of service. She will set up private physiotherapy practice in Stony Plain, Alberta.

Wheeler, who has a degree in physiotherapy, said "it's hard to prove why someone's shoulder gets better. That shoulder is different from every other shoulder.

"Part of our job is to be a teacher, to inspire people to care for themselves, to be in charge."

Wheeler, who came to Fort St. John in 1960, said one of her most memorable patients was a trapper who had been injured. "I was fresh up from Victoria. A fellow working for social services and I drove out looking for this trapper. We ended up in a mudhole with mud up to the dash. After walking miles through the trees and across a river, we came across another trapper who was just leaving for his trapline. He took us in and fed us beans and bannock, and then helped us find the injured man."

Over the years, Wheeler has helped all kinds of patients, from industrial accidents to arthritis, from strokes to falls.

She said the trend nowadays is to put more onus on the patient for his wellbeing, for doing his exercises. "I can't heal anyone's body," she said. "I think the patients benefit by feeling more independent, more in charge of their health." She said patients have moved from being passive to active.

She said she was proud of the physio department at the hospital. "There's a lot of hospitals where older people don't get the care and attention they get here." She said the doctors here are very supportive.

Wheeler said the difficulty of getting qualified Canadians to take a job in Fort St. John has given the opportunity to exchange ideas with people who have been trained in other countries. "We've had people from Britain, Kenya and South America." Thelma Ribeiro, a physiotherapist now at the hospital, is from Brazil.



# Staffing problems led to surplus

Fort St. John General Hospital wound up its fiscal year with a surplus of \$64,000. But board chairman John Wetzel told the annual meeting of the hospital society the reason for the black ink was that it had been impossible to maintain full staffing.

Dr. Art Cain, reporting for the medical staff, said that although the city now has 12 general practitioners, a number the medical

community considers adequate, two of these are only here temporarily and will soon be gone.

Even more important, he said, was the fact that the two GPs lost this year, Dr. Margaret Ormston who went to the Lower Mainland and Dr. Gary Westover who died in a plane crash, were experienced in anesthesia. The new doctors are not.

He said attempts to recruit an internist for the community are continuing.

Dennis Jacobsen asked the board to get rid of the time clock that nurses must now punch, describing it as "an archaic system and a demeaning process." He also asked when staff can expect payment of wages by direct bank deposit.

Administrator Rick Wilson said the deposit system should be in place in "three or four months." He was less specific about the time clock, agreeing it was archaic "but not necessarily demeaning," and said that its use was under discussion.

Four board members were elected from a slate of six. Fred von Ilberg, Linda Gentles, and Joan Hendrick will serve three-year terms. Hugh Hodgkinson of Hudson's Hope was elected for one year. John Wetzel was re-elected board chairman at a board meeting following the general session.



Hugh Hodgkinson, Joan Hendrick, Fred von Ilberg and Linda Gentles

## City's first cataract surgery

The first five cataract surgeries were performed Friday at the Fort St. John General Hospital. With a target of up to 200 surgeries a year, the regional service, supported by a \$59,000 grant from the ministry of health, will be a "fantastic service to the north," said Colleen Rimbey, acting director of information services at the hospital.

"Our main surgery will be cataract surgery, with some pediatric ophthalmology such as strabismus, and some general eyelid surgery and maybe some glaucoma."

Rimbey said the surgery is performed by a senior ophthalmology resident under the supervision of staff from UBC. "These are top-notch ophthalmologists."

New equipment for the procedures includes general operating room equipment such as scissors and irrigation canulas, plus an A-scan, which measures the axial length of the eye for the size of lens required in cataract surgery. Rimbey said the A-scan is a type of ultrasound machine.

The head nurse in the operating room, Val MacMillan, R.N., went for training at the UBC Eye Care Centre to observe surgical procedures.

"This program is very beneficial. Those who usually require cataract surgery are elderly, and it's difficult for them to travel." Prior to this, these patients had to travel to Prince George or Vancouver. Rimbey said there was a "huge, long wait list." She said patients would now come to Fort St. John from Dawson Creek and Fort Nelson.

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