

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
7TH COUNCIL, 53RD SESSION

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June 19, 1974

MINUTES OF TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 1974

FOR THE

MEETING CONCERNING THE PROPOSED

UPGRADING OF MEDICAL FACILITIES IN

CAMBRIDGE BAY, N.W.T.

Delegates present were:

Lena Pederson - N.W.T. Councillor for the Central Arctic
Ben Porter - Gjoa Haven
Ralph Porter - Pelly Bay
David Tucktoo - Spence Bay
Doris Angohaitok - Cambridge Bay
Charlie Bolt - Coppermine
Bill Lyall - Cambridge Bay
Prof. Silversides - N.H. & W. representative from Edmonton
Dr. Eaton

The meeting was called to order at 9:55 a.m., with Lena Pederson acting as Chair person.

L. Pederson - I regret we are starting so late. At the last regional conference held in Gjoa Haven in February, 1974, it was decided that another meeting be called to allow for more local input concerning the upgrading of the medical facilities along the Central Arctic Coast. It was decided that the meeting be held in Cambridge Bay. As soon as funds for the meeting were released by the Department of Local Government in Yellowknife, the communities concerned were informed as was Health and Welfare Canada. We requested that Health and Welfare Canada send a representative to this meeting since we notice that tenders for the proposed upgrading of the medical facilities at Cambridge Bay were called for in the May 15th issue of News of the North. We are asking that the delegates here be allowed to view the plans so that Health and Welfare Canada may have their opinion of them. Perhaps Dr. Eaton could explain the proposed plans to us.

Dr. Eaton - Unfortunately we had no advance notice of this meeting and were unable to duplicate these plans for you. Generally these plans call to import a prefabricated Nurse's residence into Cambridge Bay. We propose to add on to the existing building a remodel it so that the total treatment area will be four times what it is at present. We propose a 12 bed facility, including dental, outpatient, x-ray and public health services. We propose to construct the Nurse's residence in front of the existing structure, perhaps connecting the two with a corridor. We believe this proposal will provide adequate medical services to the population of this area for the foreseeable future, until 1980 or 1982. By that time thought will have to be given to either another addition or to the construction of a new building altogether. Do people wish to look at these plans more closely?

B. Lyall - (to Pat Donaldson, Nurse in Charge, Cambridge Bay Nursing Station)
Do you feel this proposed facility will be adequate?

P. Donaldson - Yes, 12 beds are adequate. Most important is the other services that this proposal provides for.

B. Lyall - How many will be on staff?

Mr. Silversides - we expect a nursing staff of 5, on a rotating basis.

L. Pederson - What about Doctors?

Silversides - There will be a full-time doctor.

Dr. Dale - There will be a full-time medical officer as well as public health staff.

B. Lyall - Will there be nursing aides on staff?

Dr. Eaton - There will be at least one certified R.N. and a number of staff, no matter what they are called.

B. Lyall - Since 1958, we have had a certified nursing aide along with R.N.'s here in Cambridge Bay.

Prof. Silversides - Whatever happens there will be an increase in staff; we are uncertain at present as to composition.

B. Lyall - Will the doctor be travelling to the other settlements along the Central Arctic Coast?

Dr. Eaton - Yes, until there is enough population in this area to warrant two doctors, we envisage having only one full-time doctor. Doctors need work to keep them happy and effective.

L. Pederson - What population do you require for two full-time doctors?

Dr. Eaton - About 3,000.

L. Pederson - We already have over 3,000 at present in this area.

Dr. Eaton - The current population of the area served by Cambridge Bay's medical facilities according to our figures is approximately 2,600.

L. Pederson - Does that figure include both white and native populations?

Dr. Eaton - yes.

L. Pederson - May I have your figures?

Dr. Eaton - Based on a head count done by our nursing station staff in mid 1973, Coppermine's population is 738, Holman Island's 236, Gjoa Haven's 316, Spence Bay's 399, Pelly Bay's 237, and Cambridge Bay's 717.

Ben Porter - We will check on your figure for Pelly Bay.

L. Pederson - I believe your figures are wrong, a head count done by the representatives from Gjoa Haven indicates a population of 389 while your statistics indicate only 316.

Dr. Dale - People here perhaps do not understand all the problems associated with acquiring a doctor. If you are thinking of having more doctors in order to keep more people from having to go out to Yellowknife or Edmonton, then you will need at least three. You need two doctors to perform operations and a third to travel the coastal settlements.

L. Pederson - Another reason for asking for a hospital is to give a doctor the tools he needs to work. A doctor needs an operating room.

Dr. Eaton - As Dr. Dale has pointed out, adequate surgical services require three doctors, an anaesthetist, a surgeon, plus one more to travel to the outlying settlements. If Health and Welfare Canada wanted to save money, it would be cheaper and easier to provide an operating facility here in Cambridge Bay, but overall, if this were done, we believe we would be lowering the health service standard in this area.

B. Porter - How much does it cost to evacuate a patient from Pelly Bay to Yellowknife?

P. Donaldson - About \$3,000.00.

Prof. Silversides - Another fact is that there is not enough surgery up here to keep a surgeon busy. It is safer to send surgery to Yellowknife.

L. Pederson - What about the hospital in Fort Simpson, is it the same as this plan?

Prof. Silversides - Yes, it is a 12 bed facility. It has the same services except that it has an operating room.

Dr. Eaton - Medical Services in Fort Simpson cost 10 times what they do in Yellowknife and the service is not as good. This is not to say that the service is poor, rather patients in Yellowknife have access to more expertise and greater medical sophistication than they do in Fort Simpson. It should be stressed that the money available to Northern Health Services is not unlimited - we are attempting to provide the best service to the people in the north for the money available. It doesn't help anybody to provide a service that cannot be used.

L. Pederson - You mention that by 1982, the medical facilities in this area will be reviewed again. In budgetary terms, that is only 6 years from now. Why not build a facility that will serve adequately for a longer period of time?

Dr. Eaton - The type of facility constructed depends on population growth. If the population in this area remains relatively static, the proposed facility we believe will be adequate. If something occurs here that greatly expands the population then we will be forced to reconsider.

L. Pederson - Does your proposed facility ensure that pregnant women do not have to be evacuated?

Dr. Dale - To ensure that, we would need more doctors. Our present policy is to deliver locally only women who are having their second, third or fourth child and who have no history of complications. Having a trained nurse and one doctor doesn't alter the situation, since we don't have the equipment or the staff to handle complicated deliveries.

D. Angohaitok - The residents here have strongly requested that a hospital be built for many reasons. The Government always refuses this request by saying that it doesn't have the money. It is the wish of the people here that a medical facility be constructed that will permit people to be treated locally. In the long run the Government will save money by a hospital being built here in Cambridge Bay.

B. Porter - I have here a letter from the Chairman of the Hamlet Council of Pelly Bay, Otto Apsaktow. He was planning to attend this meeting but was unable to due to other commitments. He asked that I represent him here. The letter states that after visiting all the houses in Pelly Bay, the people very strongly support that hospital facilities be constructed in Cambridge Bay.

D. Tucktoo - The residents of Spence Bay also strongly support the construction of a hospital in Cambridge Bay. As you are aware we recently had a medical evacuation disaster in which Spence Bay people lost their lives (The Hartwell case).

C. Bolt - I was a delegate at the Gjoa Haven conference in which the construction of a hospital at Cambridge Bay was strongly recommended. On behalf of the people of Coppermine, I still strongly recommend that a hospital be built. A large number of patients from Coppermine are evacuated to hospitals in the south.

R. Porter - The people in Gjoa Haven would much prefer to have more than one full-time doctor in this area and strongly support the construction of hospital facilities in Cambridge Bay.

B. Lyall - I read the report from the Gjoa Haven conference and I cannot recall any specific recommendation as to the number of doctors that should be in this area. I do however strongly support that medical facilities here be expanded and improved.

P. Donaldson - I would like to hear your definition of a hospital. Larger centers in the south have hospitals with medical specialists in every area. Do you wish to sacrifice direct access to specialist treatment for a two doctor hospital?

J. Kavanna - When we recommended the construction of a hospital, we felt we would have some access to specialists.

R. Porter - I felt we were recommending the construction of a hospital on a par with those in Edmonton or other larger southern centres. I did not expect to see only a small addition to the present facility.

D. Tucktoo - The construction of a hospital in this area has been an issue for quite some time. My interpretation of this proposal is that it is simply another nursing station - yet what the people are really asking for is a hospital.

B. Porter - We in Pelly Bay have the same feeling. It is disappointing to see a simple extension of a nursing station when the people really want hospital facilities on a par with larger southern centres.

M. Hawkins - What about an air ambulance facility?

B. Porter - Our airstrip is not suitable for a wide variety of aircraft.

Dr. Dale - Most aircraft are too small to operate in anyway.

M. Hawkins - No, I meant that perhaps an air ambulance can be used to evacuate patients quickly to a centre which can accommodate their needs.

B. Porter - Another reason for building a local hospital facility is that the isolation and strangeness of the southern hospitals is difficult for most northern people. While a person may be evacuated in an emergency, it may be required that he remain there for quite some time. Also the length of the evacuation flight is dangerous in an emergency situation.

Dr. Dale - A fact that many people perhaps don't realize is that a great number of patients are sent from Yellowknife to Edmonton because the facilities at Yellowknife are inadequate. So when you are speaking of constructing a hospital you would require a facility on a par with those in Edmonton.

L. Pederson - This is what the delegates are stating, that we should not plan and build for the short term, rather we should build a medical facility on a par with southern standards that would be of use for a long period of time. People in the High Arctic also wish hospital facilities. They are evacuated to either Frobisher Bay or Montreal. Why not construct a facility capable of handling locally, the medical services for the high Arctic and the Arctic Coast.

Doris Angohaitok - In the north we have been talking about a hospital for a number of years, yet Health and Welfare Canada does not seem to be listening to the people. They simply go ahead with their plans. It is disappointing that the Government does not consult with the people. The people here are not asking for a nursing station, they are asking for a hospital.

L. Pederson - In a political sense, the people of the north feel that they are second class citizens.

P. Donaldson - Surely the fact that northern people are sent to the best hospitals available, rather than providing care for you in the local nursing station indicates that the Government thinks of you as first class citizens.

Dr. Eaton - If you look at Ontario, I don't think any small town has the facilities you have here.

L. Pederson - Don't forget the south has vastly superior communication and transportation systems than here.

Dr. Eaton - Perhaps in southern Ontario, but in the north these systems are identical to those here.

Dr. Dale - My feeling is that you would never be able to adequately staff and support a hospital here. They would be bored. There is not enough work. A specialist would not come unless the population was 15,000 or more.

D. Angohaitok - The Government keeps saying for the people to tell them what the people want, then it will do something towards helping them. Now we are asking very strongly that the Government build a hospital here. We are asking not only for us, but for our children and their children as well. We keep asking for a hospital because we are looking to the future.

Dr. Eaton - I think we agree with everything you say except for one word - hospital. You have asked for increased medical services and we have attempted, through this proposal, to provide them. If we look at the medical needs of Canada generally, we at Health and Welfare Canada attempt to provide a service of 5 hospital beds for every 1,000 people. Here in Cambridge Bay we are providing better than this national target figure as well as providing access to the very best medical care available.

L. Pederson (to Dr. Eaton) - I explained to the delegates that you are a representative for Health and Welfare Canada and that you do not have the ultimate say over this issue. We seemed to have covered all that the delegates wish to say. We will forward a copy of the minutes to you and will be in touch with Dr. Carver. A letter will be sent to the councils of the communities represented here advising them that the expenses of the delegates attending this meeting will be covered by an allocation of \$1,500 provided by the Department of Local Government.

Thank you for attending.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

*Laura Pederson,
member of the N.W.T.
Council for Central
Arctic.*

June 4, 1974