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Public input helps create family-friendly hospital design

GRANDE PRAIRIE – When it opens in 2017, the new Grande Prairie Regional Hospital will include features that reflect input from patients and their families, thanks to a planning process that ensured their voices were heard.

Planners sought feedback on specific public and patient care areas of the facility from members of the local Health Advisory Council and QEII Hospital Foundation board, as well as other important community stakeholders, including patients and their family members.

“As their primary support network, there’s a very important role for family and loved ones in the care of the patient,” says Dianne Sweetman, unit manager for the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and pediatric department at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (QEII).

“There are things health care providers can’t give, that only the family can. Getting their perspective in the planning for the new hospital will help health care providers in looking after the emotional and social aspects of patient care.”

Alison Martens spent months in hospital with her son Jacob after he was born prematurely in 2008. Those experiences will soon help other families feel more comfortable when they need care in the new Grande Prairie Regional Hospital.

Simple things such as privacy curtains and extra plug-ins were a few of the suggestions made by the local mom, who was asked to provide planners with a parent’s perspective when design for the new hospital began. While the big decisions involving patient care are left to clinical experts, she was able to give feedback on some of the finer points of patient comfort.

“Sometimes it’s the little things – like having separate lighting above the parent’s bed that the parent controls. It doesn’t sound like a big deal until you’ve been in the hospital for two weeks and the nurse has to turn the light on right above you at 3 a.m.,” says Martens.

“A dedicated electrical outlet to charge your phone, closet space to store your stuff – those types of things can make an already challenging time that much easier to deal with.”

Diana Gitzel, operational lead for the new hospital project, says contributions from the various stakeholders have been invaluable.

“They helped us with planning how certain public and patient care areas would look and flow. Representatives from these groups helped us review the layout of certain areas, and where they need to be to function effectively. Stakeholders provided valuable input, which was very important and useful in our planning and design of these areas,” she says.

Acute care beds at the Grande Prairie Regional Hospital will be in single patient rooms only. In addition, each inpatient room will have space for a reclining chair and/or bed, providing an area where family can stay with their loved one while in the hospital.

Martens is grateful that she was included in the process alongside other members of the design and construction team, including architects, physicians, nurses, infection control staff, and a number of other support staff. Public feedback was also obtained at a number of open houses.

“What we’ve experienced, people can learn from, and it can be used to improve future patient interactions, future buildings, and future layouts. It’s been really fulfilling,” says Martens.

Research shows the safety and quality of health care services improve when the perspectives of patients and their families are included when planning the delivery of care. Patients feel better about their experience and feel better connected to the health system.

The Peace Health Advisory Council receives regular updates on the Grande Prairie Regional Hospital project and opportunities to provide feedback. Health Advisory Council meetings are always open to the public. More information about the advisory councils and upcoming meetings can be found at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/1809.asp>.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

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