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Opinion

Anne Jarvis: Health care and so much more

It's essential, smart health care. It's also urban renewal. And it honours the history of its prominent and beloved forebear. Most importantly, it demonstrates that the proposed new, single, acute care hospital is more than a hospital. It's a health care system.

Anne Jarvis • Windsor Star
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The traditional parade of young nurses dressed in their immaculate uniforms was made Sunday, June 6, 1965 along University Avenue, from Grace hospital to the Salvation Army Citadel. The nurses graduated Friday night at special ceremonies held at Cleary Auditorium. Pictured are the new graduates along with the Salvation Army Band and hospital staff who joined in the parade. (FILES/The Windsor Star)

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Most importantly, it demonstrates that the proposed new, single, acute care hospital is more than a hospital. It's a health-care system.

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The hospital's satellite health-care centre, proposed for the site of the former Grace Hospital on University Avenue at Crawford

, will continue vital medical service in the city's core and bring that service back to the west side for the first time since Grace closed in 2004.

This is no walk-in clinic. The four-storey, 80,000-square-foot building will include an urgent care centre to treat patients with less severe illness or injuries like respiratory illnesses, abdominal problems, broken bones, cuts, burns, bites, allergies, rashes and infections. It will be run by the new hospital and staffed with emergency doctors. It will also have diagnostic imaging equipment, including a CT scanner and

ultrasound, a lab and a pharmacy.

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If patients require hospital care, they'll be transported by ambulance to the hospital in a seamless transition. And it will be open 18 hours a day, longer if needed.

This is a place where real medical care will happen.

It's also smart. Almost 38,000 people with non-life-threatening illnesses and injuries go to one of Windsor's two ERs every year. About 40 per cent of them could be treated at the urgent care centre. And 71 per cent of them live within 10 kilometres of the proposed centre.





The Grace Hospital site was cleared last summer. It will become the new destination of a mega-hospital in Windsor. (Windsor Star files)

That means there would be an alternative to the emergency room. And that means emergency room patients won't have to wait as long, a chronic complaint in Windsor, where we still don't have enough doctors. Queensway Health Centre, a hospital-affiliated urgent care centre in Etobicoke, diverts 60,000 patients a year away from Toronto hospitals. People pass by four hospitals with emergency rooms to get there.

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The centre here is projected to get 30,000 patients a year and would be able to accommodate 50,000.

But that's not all. The satellite campus will also treat chronic disease, helping patients to prevent and recover from strokes and heart attacks and manage respiratory conditions, diabetes and risks to health such as obesity.

The proposed centre would provide all this while filling the 6.5-acre site of the old Grace Hospital. That's a gaping hole on a main street, one that will soon be the conduit between the University of Windsor and its new downtown campus, one that the city has set aside \$5 million to make over.

This centre would be a gift. University Avenue is key to many things the city wants to do — rebrand the tree-lined streets of beautiful old houses on either side of University Avenue

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, connect a revitalized core to struggling Sandwich and connect the riverfront to neighbourhoods south of Riverside Drive. The city envisions a transformed University Avenue with boulevards planted with rows of trees, a promenade, separate bike lanes and paths to the river.

But it's hard to do all that with a gaping vacant lot.

“Having that reactivated, having a lot of people there most hours of the day brings it to life,” said Mayor Drew Dilkens, who sees doctors’ offices, more pharmacies and other health care-related investment. “It could spur development. Maybe that will be the catalyst.”

Grace Hospital began when the old Ellis home, a grand mansion, was donated to the Salvation Army in 1918. The Salvation Army had planned a maternity hospital, but there was a shortage of hospital beds in the city, so it became a general

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Patricia Walsh shows off her souvenir brick from the former Grace Hospital site in Aug. 2013. (Jason Kryk / The Windsor Star)

hospital. For the next 86 years, until it closed in 2004, it not only brought babies into the world, it treated the sick and injured and trained nurses who were fiercely proud of their institution. It was a sad

way to end when it's crumbling shell became the symbol of urban blight

When it was finally demolished two years ago

, hundreds of people called the city asking

for one of the bricks

. Many of the callers had been born there or were former nurses. They all had a story.

So it seems fitting that the site will be reincarnated into a new health-care centre, part of a new hospital that will continue to serve the same neighbourhood.

Whether it's a garden, a fountain or something else, the new centre will rightly pay homage to The Salvation Army's long service to health care here.

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