

Expert to take stock of Riverview artifacts in Coquitlam

One of the best collections of historical medical gear in western Canada will be catalogued this year for future display in Coquitlam.

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Photograph By TRI-CITY NEWS FILE PHOTO

One of the best collections of historical medical gear in western Canada will be catalogued this year for future display in Coquitlam.

This spring, the city is expected to call for consultants to inventory the hundreds of Riverview Hospital artifacts currently in storage.

Council okayed \$120,000 last month to retain an expert to sort through the items, some of which date back to the 19th century.

The goods will be spread out in a warehouse and identified, photographed, assigned a number and electronically catalogued. As well, any objects deemed hazardous will be removed from the collection.

The assessment, which will take about six months, will be done in conjunction with the Riverview Hospital Historical Society and the Coquitlam Heritage Society, said Karen Basi, Coquitlam's cultural services manager.

The city obtained the collection from the Riverview Hospital Historical Society after reaching a deal with the Provincial Health Services Authority in 2012, when the BC Liberal government closed Riverview after 100 years.

Among the artifacts now in the city's possession are: a pump organ from the Crease clinic chapel, a china cabinet from the nursing department, sewing machines, psychiatrist couches, a barber's chair and medical equipment such as two gurneys from 1910-'30 and an electronarcosis machine. There are also formal dresses and uniforms from the late 1800s. (Basi was unable to provide the amount for which the city has them insured.)

Coquitlam Coun. Craig Hodge, chair of the city's Riverview Lands Advisory Committee and a past president of the Coquitlam Heritage Society, said the city needs "someone with expertise to evaluate what we have. It's one of the best collections of historical medical equipment in western Canada and we have to make sure it's safe today and for the future."

Hodge said the city receives several requests a year from the movie industry to have the artifacts featured in shows. Most recently, some artifacts were also presented in Mackin House — a Coquitlam heritage home and museum — as part of an exhibit called Science & Social Change.

While there are no plans in the next decade for a stand-alone museum to host the collection, Hodge said there's no reason why some pieces can't be shown at high-traffic venues such as city hall and rec centres.

Still, he said, "I'm pleased council included the inventory in the budget for this year and we can preserve this collection for years to come."

Founded in 1913 as a mental health institution, Riverview Hospital had 2,000 employees and 4,500 residents at its peak as well as its own school, fire department and community centre.

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