

Ottawa Mission adds seven hospice beds for homeless



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The Ottawa Mission is expanding its Diane Morrison Hospice to 21 beds from 14 to give more homeless people the support and dignity they need in their final days.

The extra seven beds inside the renovated space at 53 Daly Ave., next to the Mission on Waller Street, mean those with life-threatening illnesses will not have to suffer alone, Marg Smeaton, the Mission's manager of health services, said Monday.

“We’re seeing our clients that are coming in that haven’t had any medical intervention, who don’t have anyone that is looking after them, who have really complicated medical needs,” said Smeaton, who says clients are in their 20s to their 80s. “And so when we bring them in, it’s often for longer period of time that they are with us — palliative but chronic palliative.”

The centre opened in 2001 and provides 24-hour care. Through a partnership with Ottawa Inner City Health, nurses, client-care workers and other health professionals offer patients physical, emotional and spiritual support at every stage.

The expansion is funded through the Ottawa Mission Foundation and Telus.

Smeaton said the need for growth is due in part because of a lack of affordable housing in the city. With hospitals taxed, the 14-bed centre was always at capacity.

“There are people that had high medical needs that had nowhere else to go,” she says. “I guess they could sit in a hospital ward, but that doesn’t provide somebody with dignity of life that they deserve at the end of their life.”

Compassion and understanding are necessary when treating patients who have lived most of their lives on the street, she said. As well, because patients have typically encountered other Mission

services such as its shelter, its learning centre and its primary care service, the move to the hospice — as opposed to another facility — is less intimidating.

“They are already part of the community here, so it’s really easy to say, ‘If you need more care we can provide it,’ ” Smeaton said.