

Sisters' legacy of caring for those most vulnerable lives on at Villa Caritas

The Misericordia Sisters arrived in Edmonton on May 29, 1900, to open a small maternity hospital in a converted warehouse. The Sisters admitted their first patient on September 1, 1900, and for as long as Edmonton has been a city, there has been a Misericordia Hospital meeting the needs of those most vulnerable in the community.

The Misericordia Sisters welcomed anyone in need, making the hospital a multi-purpose institution. It grew to include an orphanage, boarding residence and general medical hospital. This growth meant a more permanent location was needed, and in March of 1969, a new Misericordia Hospital was constructed in West Edmonton, where it still operates today.

The Misericordia campus now includes Villa Caritas. This acute mental health facility carries on the legacy of the Misericordia Sisters and their founder Mother Rosalie Cadron Jetté, through compassionate care of those most vulnerable.

Villa Caritas was built on the land that previously housed the Pineview building, originally built as a temporary home for unwed mothers. The entry wall of Villa Caritas includes bricks from the Pineview building, and in the foyer, artwork has been erected depicting a mask wearing a habit. In the habit, babies are swaddled, representing the Sister's care of mothers and babies. Both the bricks and the art symbolize staff's dedication to continuing to serve vulnerable populations in the community today.

Villa Caritas specializes in caring for seniors with complex mental and medical health issues, and focuses on the whole person, body, mind and soul. Staff work to improve the mental health of seniors to maximize function and capability in all areas of their lives, involving each patient in all aspects of their treatment and recovery.

Gail Tricker, Program Manager, Villa Caritas, explains in the five years it has been open, the facility has made significant changes to improve treatment for seniors with mental illness by involving patients and families in care.

"In clinical care it is easy to get focused on the diagnosis and forget that this is a real person," says Gail. "Here, we focus on mental wellness, not mental illness."

A program that embodies this philosophy is the Exercise and Wellness group that runs each day at 10:30 a.m.

Rehabilitation and nursing staff begin the group by discussing the importance of healthy living, using the concept of caring for one's body, mind and soul. They talk about how activity and exercise contribute to mental wellness, and then staff participate in exercises with the patients. The exercises are modified to each patient's ability level.

Gail explains this is just one program staff have developed to help patients function independently in the community. She says she is proud of the support that is provided to ensure patients are able to maintain their independence, without repeated hospitalization.

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Misericordia Sisters