

Refuge and Renewal: museum exhibit chronicles history of psychiatric care in Kingston

March 13, 2007

A new exhibit about the history of mental health care at Kingston's original psychiatric hospital will chronicle the transformation of care from incarceration to rehabilitation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibit by the Museum of Health Care, "Rockwood Asylum: Refuge and Renewal 1878-1905," will be unveiled at Providence Continuing Care Centre's Mental Health Services site on March 15 to celebrate our staff and to mark 150 years of providing mental health care in Kingston.

Construction of Rockwood Asylum began in 1859 to house the "criminally insane" of Kingston Penitentiary. It was the second asylum to be built in Ontario, after Toronto. Overlooking Lake Ontario, the site was thought to have a calming effect on patients. The imposing limestone building began accepting non-criminal patients in 1868 and Rockwood became part of the Ontario provincial asylum system in 1877.

"The display explores the period at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the treatment of the mentally ill was beginning to change," explains Museum of Health Care curator Paul Robertson. "The asylums of the 1800's began transforming from a warehouse for the insane to a genuine treatment facility and full-service hospital." There was a movement away from the brutal confinements and various medicinal treatments (including alcohol) toward the recognition that mental illness is a disease that can be treated."

The exhibit tells the story of the former Rockwood Asylum through photographs and artefacts ranging from postcards to medical equipment from the era. "The exhibit includes a replica of a nurse's uniform," Robertson says. "The period marked the beginning of formal training for psychiatric nurses, the first of its kind in Ontario and one of the first in North America."

Providence Continuing Care Centre today operates PCCC Mental Health Services – the former Kingston Psychiatric Hospital, located at 752 King Street West. PCCC has three main sites: St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital, Mental Health Services and Providence Manor in Kingston.

*Editor's Note: Media are invited to attend the opening of the display gallery in the lobby of PCCC Mental Health Services on March 15 at 2:00 p.m. at 752 King Street West. Master of Ceremonies will be Dr. Nicholas Delva, Professor and Head of Psychiatry, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Other speakers include PCCC President & CEO Cathy Dunne, Curator Paul Robertson and Connie Cox, a retired nurse representing the School of Nursing.*

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Media contacts:

Corinne Deshaw, Communications Officer, Providence Continuing Care Centre: 613-548-5567 ext. 5668 or Paul Robertson, Curator, Museum of Health Care: 613-549-6666 ext. 2569.