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Over at the Don, new hope stirs

Gallows remain a landmark as Bridgepoint Hospital reworks a former forbidding jail into a place of deep caring

By JENNY YUEN, SUN MEDIA

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They're taking incarceration and turning it into innovation.

The peeling paint and iron bars of the Don Jail will be traded for sunnier tones and an optimistic outlook as the detention centre is being retrofitted as part of the new Bridgepoint Hospital.

The \$622 million hospital is being designed for treating patients with complex chronic diseases, including renal failure, brain injury, HIV/AIDS and advanced diabetes.

"While we know a lot about treating a single disease, many people have two or three of those," said Bridgepoint Health CEO Marian Walsh.

"It will be breaking new ground by creating the research and care facilities that will bring us forward to help people.

"This will also help transform the whole corner of Gerrard and Broadview."

About 100 people watched politicians and hospital board members dig shovels into the ground near St. Matthews Rd. yesterday, as the construction phase officially began.

The new state-of-the-art 10-storey hospital will have 472 beds, modern therapy areas on each floor and new public areas. It is set to open February, 2013.

A modern glass bridge will connect the hospital with the historic Don Jail, which since its closing in 1977, has been preserved and will be restored and used as an administrative building.

The bars of the cells will be removed and the spaces converted into offices, except for one cellblock, which will be left alone. That hallway also houses the gallows.

"They're going to hollow out those cells and make them large enough for a desk," said Rychard Bannerman, a tour guide.

Michael Blackmore, 45, who survived a stroke almost three years ago, and spent a year at Bridgepoint, said this new hospital gives patients the resources they need.

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