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Hospice's sale 'won't change' nursing care

By Sally Pryor

Selling Clare Holland House will not change the status quo relating to palliative care services in Canberra one bit, according to Deputy Chief Minister Katy Gallagher.

But if last night's public meeting held by the ACT Palliative Care Society was any indication, the recurring question from those with an interest in the lakeside hospice is: why sell it at all?

More than 100 people gathered at the Woden Southern Cross Club last night to listen to arguments put forward by Ms Gallagher, Greens spokeswoman Amanda Bresnan, Liberal spokesman Jeremy Hanson, and others.

They were supposed to be discussing the relative merits of the Government buying Calvary Hospital, currently owned by the Little Company of Mary, for \$77 million, in exchange for Clare Holland House, which is being offered to the non-profit Catholic outfit for \$9 million.

But two hours into the meeting, it seemed the question to Ms Gallagher as to why the hospice needed to be sold at all was not being answered satisfactorily.

It was clear that most in the room were of the view there were fundamental issues of principle at stake regarding ownership of the hospice, and it should remain untouched.

Lawyer Peter O'Keeffe, who has a long-standing interest in the hospice, made a stirring plea to the Government not to breach the trust the hospice had placed in it by using it as a "sweetener" in the sale of Calvary Hospital.

He received a standing ovation.

He said once the hospice was transferred into private hands, it would forever be lost.

The Government has yet to make a final decision on the sale.