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## First Medical Cannabis Patients Registered as OCR Plans Next Licensing Phase

OCR announced the registration of medical cannabis patients in St. Thomas and St. John. Upcoming efforts include public education, compliance tracking, and the rollout of cultivation licenses and lab testing proposals by the end of March.

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The lack of a quorum prevented the Cannabis Advisory Board from taking any binding decisions during its meeting on Wednesday, however those in attendance were able to learn more about the Office of Cannabis Regulation's plans for the next phase of the cannabis licensing rollout in the territory.

The first medical cannabis patients have now been registered on St. Thomas and St. John, OCR Executive Director Joanne Moorehead disclosed. “That’s exciting news,” she said, articulating expectations that the rolls of medical users will grow with time.

Another bright point was the beginning of the working relationship with Metrc, makers of a comprehensive inventory tracking system that will be used to monitor regulatory compliance. “We are working with them with an eye to go live potentially at the end of the summer,” Ms. Moorehead said. Noting that the partnership news had been met with only lukewarm to medium levels of excitement from people who have had previous experience with the platform, Ms. Moorehead nevertheless hoped that improvements in the interface in the intervening period would result in a more positive roll out in the territory.

A major public education campaign is in the works, said Ms. Moorehead. “I think it’s critically important that the public is aware of what the law really says,” she declared, “especially now that we have enforcement on board.” OCR employs four enforcement officers, two on St. Croix and two in the St. Thomas-St. John district. “They are thick in the midst of a lot of training,” Ms. Moorehead told attendees. “This requires a pretty steep learning curve.”

On the public education and awareness front, OCR is collaborating with the V.I. Police Department, Department of Health, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, and the Department of Education on “a really multifaceted campaign.” Unfortunately, the original goal of rolling out the full campaign in time for Carnival on St. Thomas is unlikely to be achieved. “I’ve had some unexpected wrinkles with the procurement part,” Ms. Moorehead explained. OCR will still try to leverage the attention and engagement surrounding Carnival activities, perhaps with a series of posts on social media, Ms. Moorehead declared.

The next phase of the licensing regime – cultivation licenses and micro-cultivation permits – will be rolled out by March 31. Requests for proposals for lab testing facilities will also be issued around the same time. Once applications for cultivation are open, however, Ms. Moorehead sees the need to make a concerted effort to engage the public, “so people understand the process and that they are clear on what to submit, when to submit, how much to pay, etc.” Informational sessions and public meetings will be a crucial part of the rollout, she declared.

She added, “I think it would be in the best interest of everybody to make sure that those who are interested in applying have an opportunity to ask questions to make sure that they submit their application as complete as possible.” Noting that it is not a “first-come first-served” process,” Ms. Moorhead spent time emphasizing OCR’s desire to ensure that the complex applications are done correctly to maximize the chances of success.

Despite their lack of quorum, the CAB members in attendance still chose to end the meeting with an executive session closed to the public to discuss personnel updates. The next meeting of the Cannabis Advisory Board was set for April 2.