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Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony Celebrates Dialysis Center Opening on St. Croix

VIHCF celebrated the grand opening of its hemodialysis unit with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The facility, supported by DCI and government funding, will provide critical care for kidney disease patients in the territory.

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Guests tour the VIHCF dialysis center in Sunny Isle, located across from the WAPA office. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Virgin Islands Healthcare Foundation had a triumphant moment on Friday, hosting a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the grand opening of its hemodialysis unit on St. Croix.

“This project was born out of the urgent need to ensure that our residents who are dependent on this lifesaving treatment for end-stage kidney disease, receive the highest standard of care without having to endure the hardship of moving away from home or being evacuated once again in case of a hurricane,” said VIHCF Founder Dr. Jan Tawakol, as he gave introductory remarks.

The new facility, said VIHCF Patient Advocate Aminah Saleem, would not have been possible without the incredible assistance provided by Dialysis Clinic Incorporated (DCI), which runs over 250 dialysis units across the country. “This story is a story that could be in a book,” Ms. Saleem exclaimed, explaining that a connection between DCI and VICHF was forged in 2017, when dialysis patients were forced to go to [facilities on the mainland](#) to receive treatment. One of those facilities was a DCI clinic.

“Dr. Johnson and their teams, they started sending stuff here to the Virgin Islands for the dialysis patients after they returned, and DCI has been with us since then,” Ms. Saleem noted. “They stuck with us. They stayed with us.” When it came time to rebuild local dialysis capacity, DCI “sent engineers down, they sent architects down, they sent water specialists down — they sent all of those people to help us,” Ms. Saleem told the audience. “We made it with their care and love and understanding.”

According to DCI founder Dr. Keith Johnson, however his organization played merely a “small part” in getting this facility off the ground. “It is a demonstration that no matter how difficult a problem is to be solved, if the problem is worth solving, and if a team of people who all believe in the solution...get together and work together, it may take a while...but they will accomplish it.”

Integral to the construction of the new dialysis center was financial support from central government. In his remarks, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said that the decision to provide the funding was an easy one. “Amina came to my office with a 60-page PowerPoint presentation, and sat down on my couch,” he recounted, referring to VIHCF Patient Advocate Aminah Saleem. “I don't want to see your presentation,” he told her. “What do you want?” Ms. Saleem then outlined her request for \$1 million. “That's all?” Governor Bryan quipped. Unfortunately that wasn't all, as rising costs and project complications required another million dollars in contributions. However, “it was for a good cause,” the governor conceded.

Those funds, along with money received through the American Rescue Plan Act, and the support of DCI, enabled VIHCF to — after almost a decade of work — open the territory's newest dialysis facility. “Today we see what really is a testament to perseverance and hard work, because we've been talking about this for at least the last eight years,” Governor Bryan noted.