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UVI and NYU Forge Groundbreaking Nursing Partnership to Strengthen Virgin Islands Healthcare

A new partnership between UVI and NYU will provide student and faculty exchanges, affiliate faculty roles, and expanded clinical experiences, with the aim of retaining local nursing talent and strengthening the Virgin Islands healthcare system.

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A partnership between the University of the Virgin Islands and New York University is anticipated to offer innovative exchange opportunities for students and faculty in UVI's School of Nursing.

Dr. Sascha James-Contarelli, program manager of NYU's Rory Meyers College of Nursing and Dr. Lisa Lewis, Dean of the UVI School of Nursing, brokered the arrangement. They both spoke

to the Consortium on the value of the arrangement.

For Dr. James-Contarelli, the arrangement offers “unique experiences” to students and faculty at both universities. It bridges the gap between nursing education in New York’s urban setting and the territory’s rural limitations. The partnership, said Dr. James-Contarelli, creates an avenue to “address the disparities that we see in healthcare and be better prepared to be better practitioners.”

UVI’s nursing students and faculty will gain access to resources and perspectives from their counterparts at NYU. “All that does is just build a better workforce at the end of the day and make us stronger,” Dr. James-Contarelli said. Outside of the learning exchange, the partnership offers faculty at both schools the opportunity to serve as “affiliate faculty at both places.” It is expected to mold faculty into “world practitioners”, particularly as the classroom sizes between the campuses differ vastly. At NYU, there are, on average, 700 students enrolled, compared to just a tenth of that number at UVI.

Dr. James-Contarelli, a native Virgin Islander, is particularly excited about the long-term results of the partnership. She referred to it as an “innovative way for us to say we’re meeting and we’re starting to develop goals and standards that are unique.” Another of the partnership’s goals is to ultimately increase the local nursing workforce.

Dr. James-Contarelli knows that nursing students often relocate to the mainland to pursue educational opportunities that are not always available locally. It then becomes easy for students to remain on the mainland and seek work there. Now, Dr. James-Contarelli says that by developing creative ways to educate UVI students at home, they will be exposed to “more resources and opportunities in which they can broaden their experience.”

Dr. Lewis agrees. She believes the partnership with NYU will grant her students the “additional experiences that we don’t necessarily get in the territory.” She expects that it will provide “new and fresh ideas, innovation, and different ways of thinking about health care.” “The more we can enhance clinical experiences for a BSN student, it does ultimately benefit the territory,” Dr. Lewis explained. It’s why the pair are also seeking to “create pathways to advance your education so that they don’t have to leave the Virgin Islands in order to get an advanced degree.”

The dean of UVI’s School of Nursing stressed the importance of having nursing students transition to leadership positions after graduation. Dr. Lewis believes the partnership will assist in that goal. “They come back excited, and they want to implement some of these things either as students...but definitely when they graduate.”

UVI intends to leverage this partnership to enhance the university’s curriculum, leaning on the knowledge of the faculty at NYU. The exchange program is open to the School of Nursing’s entire student population.

Both Dr. James-Contarelli and Dr. Lewis are graduates of New York University. As two Caribbean women educated on the U.S mainland, Dr. James-Contarelli says that “seeing the opportunities that are afforded to the folks in the states and on the mainland is something we want and will bring to our folks.”

The memorandum of understanding, conceptualized about a year ago, is now set to provide numerous benefits for medical care in the territory. “We’re on the cutting edge. This isn’t something just very unique. No one’s doing this,” beamed Dr. James-Contarelli.