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JFL Opens Intensive Care Unit with Additional Beds, Support for COVID-19 Response

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Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (JFL) was in such bad shape five months ago that the governor of the Virgin Islands declared it to be in a state of public exigency.

It was entering the middle stages of a painful recovery from 2017's monster Hurricane Maria — not to mention severe mold, plumbing and sewage issues — and matters were not going well. Gov. Albert Bryan in October reluctantly issued an emergency order to cut through red tape slowing repairs and reconstruction.

Today, JFL is celebrating the long-anticipated opening of a 12-room intensive care unit hospital officials are calling “state of the art” and just in time to help manage the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease sweeping the territory.

"We are pleased to announce the opening of JFL's newly refurbished Intensive Care Unit, which adds another 12 rooms to the facility's bed capacity which can, in the event of an influx of patients, be turned into an isolation ward," according to a written statement Wednesday announcing the ICU opening. "Two additional anterooms are able to transition quickly into negative pressure rooms for isolation, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control." The ICU previously had six beds.

"JFL remains committed to raising the bar in meeting healthcare needs of the St. Croix community," said JFL's Acting Chief Executive Officer Dyna Williams.

New to the ICU is the installation of Lumalier ultraviolet and disinfectant light systems that target and eliminate the spread of airborne pathogens – including mold, bacteria, and viruses. The system will help the territory's overall response to the coronavirus outbreak, which saw the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases more than double to 17 in the past week. Nine of those confirmed cases are in St. Croix and eight are in St. Thomas. Public health officials are still awaiting results for 30 tests done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

JFL Critical Care Physician Dr. Carol Shores said the capital improvements are valuable in the fight against COVID-19. "The unit is closed off from the rest of the hospital, operates with its own supply room, and provides much better traffic flow. We are excited about adding this extra layer of protection that will help to keep our patients and staff safer," Dr. Shores said.

JFL also advised the community that persons entering the premises will be greeted by members of the JFL security team at the front gate. Each person entering the facility will find a tent, with a table, and a uniformed Security Guard and/or Law Enforcement Officer. The public is urged to fully cooperate with the screening at the gate as the process has been implemented for the safety of the public and JFL patients and staff.

In addition, for the safety of the community and JFL staff, clients with billing concerns may call 340-778-6311 and ask for billing; clients requesting Medical Records should ask for extension 2883 or e-mail eherberbert@jflusvi.org. It is highly recommended that clients call or e-mail prior to coming in to JFL as most requests can be handled over the phone or by e-mail. If a visit is necessary, with pre-notification and confirmation of a scheduled visit by phone or email, staff will work to ensure that the in-person visit is efficient.

The hospital said it's also hiring qualified healthcare professionals to supplement capacity on a temporary or permanent basis. Hazardous pay incentives are available for persons providing direct patient care to potential COVID-19 patients. Health care professionals interested in joining the team can visit the hospital job announcements page at www.jflusvi.org or contact JFL Human Resources at (340)778-6311, ext. 2818.

Ms. Williams and the JFL Team thanked the many individuals and organizations who have come forward to assist in the COVID-19 response effort.

Anyone who wants to contribute to JFL's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to support patients and frontline healthcare workers may contact rlewis@jflusvi.org using the word DONATION in the subject line. JFL is asking the community to donate much-needed personal protective equipment (PPE) items and supplies, including N-95 masks, procedure masks, procedure masks with visors, hand sanitizer (70% alcohol sanitizer), and full-face shields with foam. Monetary donations are also accepted.

"Due to the nature of COVID-19, we are unable to accept donations of handmade PPEs (including masks and gowns) and food/drink from non-restaurants for hospital staff," the hospital said.

