

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Griffith: CMS Decision Wrong, JFL Will Not Close

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Stating that there are no intentions for layoffs, the hospital would not be shuttered and executives would quickly begin the appeal process for Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL) to regain its accredited status, Interim Chief Executive Officer Dr. Kendall Griffith said at a press conference today that the decision made this week by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to decertify JFL "is not a true or accurate picture of the hospital's current operating conditions."

Griffith seemed to imply surprise when he said he learned of CMS's decision to stop reimbursements to the hospital, effective Oct. 9, which would strip St. Croix's only hospital of its accredited status. He pointed out he was misled by CMS representatives on the scope of the organization's most recent audit.

I do not believe we should have received decertification. I will have that feeling until the day I die. It is wrong. -- Dr. Griffith.

"We were informed that a new hospital-wide survey was being conducted during CMS's last visit, and would only reflect events that occurred from July 28, 2014 to August 1, 2014," he explained. However, Griffith continued, "the report includes an accumulation of events from 2011 to 2014; thus, there is no justification for decertification and we will appeal this decision."

At the time Dr. Griffith took the top post at JFL in Jan. 2013, he said the hospital was steeped in a host of challenges, including low employee morale, unresolved environmental care issues, insufficient clinical and medical staff, a decline in government funding, conflict among physicians, lack of equipment and supplies to perform surgeries and debt in excess of \$40 million.

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However, the CEO said JFL's challenges were no different from those faced by many healthcare facilities.

"We all know and it is well documented that JFL has suffered through some very serious financial and staffing challenges throughout our history," he said. "These challenges, as well as the others we face are consistent with many hospitals across the country. You will not find a hospital anywhere in the United States that has not experienced these same challenges at some point in time."

Dr. Griffith went on to say that the staff at JFL had been working "diligently and tirelessly to meet or exceed all of CMS's standards for participation in their medicare and medicare program," at the time CMS decided to pull out.

When asked about the specific deficiencies that led to JFL being decertified by CMS, Dr. Griffith deflected the question, only stating that CMS will disclose details of its audit in a report that will be made public on Sept. 25. In order to be accredited, a hospital must be certified by CMS.

With CMS's pull out, JLF will lose more than half of its funding--59 percent. However, Dr. Griffith said the hospital will still be able to function financially without CMS's support, and he is currently in talks with the Governor, the Delegate to Congress and other government entities to find other means of funding "to ensure smooth operations over the next few months."

However, he added that while the appeal filing will be immediate, he is unsure how long the process will take.

Near the end of the press conference, Griffith stressed, "The hospital will not shut down. The hospital will not close. We will continue operations as is because we have a mandate to provide care for all, regardless of the ability to pay."

And on Oct. 10, the day after CMS terminates its relationship with JFL, Griffith encouraged the public to "do not hesitate to come to the hospital because you think that you won't be able to be seen because you can't pay. We will take care of you. We will continue services for every, single person on this island."

