

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jamila Russell: Dr. Griffith "Should Step Aside"

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Popular St. Croix radio personality and senatorial candidate for the 31st Legislature, Jamila Russell, in an interview on 102.1 FM, Life Radio on Saturday, said she believes Juan Luis Interim CEO Dr. Kendall Griffith should "step aside," and allow new leadership to take the helm at the mired hospital.

Russell, although acknowledging the issues highlighted in the CMS report, praised the staff of Juan Luis, recalling her lengthy stay at the facility from July 11, 2013 to November 1, 2013 when her son had been shot in the neck by a federal officer.

"[My son] was in the ICU the entire time, he never came out. And I saw dedicated nurses in the ICU," she said. "Some people say, 'Oh, he got special treatment because they

knew you were his mother,' but all of that aside, I saw quality healthcare being administered at the hospital."

She added, "Of course everybody's human, there are days where somebody is off their game, because we're human and we're not perfect beings."

However, after lauding the JFL staff, Russell expressed displeasure in the way the revelation of the disturbing contents of the CMS report has been handled by Dr. Griffith.

"I understand what the CSM report has said, and I don't think taking an adversarial position to CMS adds any value or any benefit to what's going on at the Juan F. Luis Hospital," she said. "I was at the [Juan Luis emergency press conference], and I know that when somebody attacks you and say you're no good and you haven't done anything good, your first reaction is to try to point out all the good things that you've done. And I know that that's what Dr. Griffith did, I think he is a great doctor -- I know him, I think he is personable, however at that press conference, I don't think any of the issues that plagued the hospital were addressed."

Russell went on to say she believes Dr. Griffith should resign, not because he is a bad doctor, but because in JFL's efforts to become recertified after its pending decertification when CMS terminates its relationship with the hospital on Oct. 9, new management would prove to CMS that the hospital is serious about taking the right steps.

"I think he should step aside," Russell offered. "In all the research that I've done since the decertification, most of the places that have been decertified and are now getting recertified, one of the steps that they took with CMS, was to show that the leadership that failed you is no longer in place. We have new leadership, so please give our new leadership the opportunity to correct the mistakes that you've pointed out."

Russell further pointed out that Dr. Griffith, being an interim CEO, did not apply for the chief executive job at Juan Luis and questioned whether it was a position he even wanted. She said she was sure the heart surgeon would love to get back to doing "what he loves best," or "maybe go back to the Cardiac Center full time"--and allow an administrator to come up with the corrective action needed to get [Juan Luis] recertified.

Russell, who tried and failed to win a seat in the 30th Legislature in 2012, is hoping to garner enough support that would give her a seat in the Virgin Islands Senate come Nov. 4.