

The Virgin Islands Consortium

De Jongh to JFL: "Stop Giving The Public The Impression" The Gov't Doesn't Do Its Part

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The Government of the Virgin Islands, under the watch of Governor de Jongh, has demonstrated "unwavering support" for the Juan F. Luis Hospital (JFL), de Jongh said in a Friday press release, rebuking the hospital's leadership and urging CEO Kendall Griffith and other hospital officials to "stop playing the blame game" and accept the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) decision to reject the hospital's Plan of Correction for what it is.

On Oct. 3, a Juan Luis delegation met with CMS officials in Baltimore and presented a Plan of Correction after results from an August audit of the hospital prompted CMS to announce it would terminate its relationship with the hospital on Oct. 9. However, CMS

officials in Baltimore rejected JFL's plan in a letter sent to the hospital on Oct. 6, instead giving JFL six weeks, up until Nov. 20, to get its house in order, which, if achieved, will prompt the agency to give a nine-month extension.

Ostensibly, the hospital's leadership and district board have been warring internally concerning who is to blame for CMS's rejection of JFL's action plan, and Gov. de Jongh himself revealed his distaste of the way in which JFL is handling the matter.

"The October 6th letter from CMS was direct and clear -- in one paragraph it stated we did not request a Plan of Correction and in another paragraph it says we do not accept it. To not accept is to reject. There is no other way for any of us to spin it, because if the hospital's plan had been accepted, we would undoubtedly be having a different conversation. So, I suggest we just accept the letter at its face value," de Jongh offered.

The Governor added: "What is clear, however, in the October 6th correspondence is that CMS saw quite a bit of non-compliance on past submissions of both corrective action plans and systems improvement agreements. Admittedly, it also witnessed a genuine commitment to achieve an improved quality of care on the part of the current leadership, and I believe that is an underlying reason for CMS granting the extension."

De Jongh also reminded the hospital's leadership that in order to avert deaccreditation, there must be seamless collaboration between all branches of government, and asked JFL leaders to stop painting an unfavorable picture that shows a dysfunctional relationship between it and the government.

"It means the hospital has to stop giving the public the impression that the government, of which it is a part, does not provide the required resources when, in fact, over the last several years, from meeting hospital payroll and then writing-off this obligation, to paying the hospitals' utility bills and providing additional funding as most recently exhibited, the government has demonstrated unwavering support.

Continuing his admonition, de Jongh said the CMS report is no secret, as some publications have made available the full document, while others have taken pertinent portions of it and released them to the public, contending that there was no reason to continue pointing fingers at each other and the government. Instead, de Jongh said, everyone should come together and work for the survival of Juan Luis.

"It is unsettling when despite the best efforts of all parties that include my office, the territorial hospital board, which has virtually been ignored in this entire process, yet has remained supportive; the Delegate to Congress and the Legislature have come together to support the JFL hospital that its leadership and district board members are continuing to play a blame game," de Jongh concluded.