

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Board Approves Loan Up To \$21 Million For Medical School Construction

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In a special meeting of the University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees held on Feb. 13, a resolution was approved authorizing the university to enter into a loan, not to exceed \$21 million, with the U.S. Department of Education Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Program for the construction of buildings for the UVI School of Medicine.

Dr. David Hall, UVI president, began making plans in earnest for a medical school when a \$30 million gift was granted to the university last April from Chicago businessman, Dr. Chirinjeev Kathuria. That gift, UVI officials say, will be used for the operation of the medical school, allowing the university to create an endowment with start-up funds.

The announcement of the construction loan comes months after the board announced in November it had approved materials and agreements to be submitted to the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME), the authority for the accreditation of medical education programs leading to doctor of medicine degrees, as part of UVI's medical school accreditation process.

Documents approved by the Board of Trustees included:

- UVI School of Medicine introduction and overview
- Bylaws
- Diversity policy
- Operating policies and procedures

Affiliation agreements with the following universities and hospitals were also approved:

- University of Central Florida – curriculum, assessment tools, faculty development, licensure and payment schedule
- University of South Florida – clinical training rotations – 4th year Tampa General Hospital
- University of South Florida – professional advisory and training services – management and development simulation center
- University of South Florida – academic affiliation agreement
- Schneider Regional Medical Center – clinical training
- Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center – clinical training

Dec. 1 marked the deadline for the submission of the documents and agreements to LCME. If paperwork was not submitted by that date, it would hamper the university's ability to open its School of Medicine in the fall of 2016, as it intends.

In an interview with *VI Consortium*, UVI President Dr. David Hall said the university's road to accreditation of its medical school began with the hiring of Interim Dean Dr. Benjamin Sachs last May. Hall said Sachs has been responsible for spearheading the compilation of the required paperwork for accreditation.

"It is an enormous task; there is no guarantee at all that we will pass their standards, but I think we are working as hard as we can," Dr. Hall said. "Dr. Sachs is working as hard as he can, along with a lot of people at UVI. We've had a lot of people in the medical community who have contributed greatly to helping us move this along, as well."

Furthermore, the architectural designs for the construction of the medical school classroom building on St. Thomas and a simulation center on St. Croix are also required to be submitted to LCME for review and approval.

In addition, Hall said LCME looks for evidence of public support when it comes to granting accreditation to a public medical school, such as UVI.

"I thank the Legislature, I thank the Governor for the support they have provided because without having the support for the facilities, this would be a non-starter," he said. "If we had not received the support of Governor de Jongh, if we had not received the support of the Legislature for the two facilities, then we could have closed up shop and I appreciate their support."

He explained that de Jongh requested a \$700,000 debt service to be approved by the Legislature in order to build the classroom building and the simulation center. After discussion and debate, the Legislature ultimately approved the Governor's request.

"So, that means it's not just one year; that means it's on going, so that we can build the two facilities and the Governor has now signed off on it," Hall explained. "We have not accessed those funds yet, because we are still in the process of designing the buildings, but the fact that we have that approval, allows us to go out and borrow money to begin to construct those buildings."

Hall pointed out that the LCME paperwork will only give the medical school preliminary accreditation, adding that "until those students you admit in the first year go through four years of medical training and then take the test at the end, and based on how well they do, that's when LCME will give you full accreditation."

Dr. Hall said UVI should have a decision about the preliminary accreditation from LCME this month.

"They will do an internal review of materials once we submit them, they have a board or committee that will make the ultimate recommendation, and that group meets in February," Hall explained.

If UVI School of Medicine is given LCME accreditation, it will be the first of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean to have the designation.

In addition to approving the loan, the board approved a resolution authorizing the fiscal year 2015-2016 Government of the Virgin Islands appropriation request of \$29,654,053. The request is \$100,000 more than the current fiscal year appropriation, in order to support the newly created Distinguished Professorship in International Relations and Diplomacy in honor of Ambassador Terence A. Todman through V.I. Act no. 7647.

The Board is scheduled to meet next on March 7 at the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix.