

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Vialet Calls For Decrease In Traveling Nurses, Pay Raise For Locals

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ST. THOMAS -- Officials of the Schneider Regional Medical Center gathered at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Thursday to present the hospital's fiscal year 2016 operating cost of \$107 million; defend its budget request from the Government of the Virgin Islands (GVI) of \$25,898,475; talk about the strides the facility has made in various areas, including its successful Centers for Medicare and Medicaid surprise inspection; and also the challenges the facility faces with uncompensated care costs, which currently stands at \$16,830,522,59 for 2015.

Senators applauded SRMC's staff and quickly moved forward with the day's business. One such senator was St. Croix Democrat Kurt Vialet, who requested information on the

amount of traveling nurses currently employed at the facility, compared to local, permanent employees.

Officials revealed the salary for a traveling nurse as \$120,000 annually, which includes housing and transportation. And with 29 traveling nurses currently employed at SRMC, the total cost for the hospital equates to roughly \$3.4 million. The amount that local or permanent nurses make is considerably less, Violet said, and suggested decreasing traveling nurses to cut cost, while raising the salaries of locals.

"The flip side is you don't want to lose good nurses," Violet said, referring to the local nurses who live in the territory but have other options elsewhere. "And that's why I want the numbers [so I could see] whether or not we'd be able to give the local nurses a raise if we can reduce the amount of traveling nurses."

He added: "The field of nursing is extremely hard and nurses are the ones that provide that full time care for sick patients, so we've got to protect them. If we're going to increase quality healthcare we've got to make sure that the nurses are compensated the way they're supposed to."

Overall, according to Dr. Bernard A. Wheatley, chief executive officer of SRMC, the hospital is on the right path, even as it faces a \$7 Million total net loss for 2015.

The facility's fiscal 2016 budget request from the general fund only supports salaries and benefits of employees with NOPAs. In 2014, the GVI allotted \$22 million to the hospital which covered 49 percent of overall payroll costs at a time when total operating expenses totaled \$111,778,812. Back then, revenues stood at \$71,744,699 -- resulting in a deficit of \$40 million before appropriations.

Salaries and wages account for 34.5 percent of SRMC's operating expenses, and the facility has 600 positions.

"SRMC is solely responsible for all its operating expenses and our only funding sources, besides our monthly allotment from the government, are generated from gross revenues collected from the following sources: Medicare (43%), Medicaid (13%), Self-Pay (17%), Cigna (14%), and Commercial & Other (13%)," Wheatley said.

The CEO also highlighted its outstanding results following the CMS visit.

"On May 7th, SRMC received its certification of accreditation from the Joint Commission, which will remain in effective for the next three years. On May 21st, SRMC received its official response and survey findings report from CMS. According to the report, the Schneider Hospital has been found in compliance with the Conditions of Participation of CMS, and is not required to submit a plan of correction.," Wheatley said.

"SRMC's ability to successfully complete these rigorous, unannounced surveys is testament to the quality of care our organization provides and the high level of commitment of our medical, nursing, clinical and ancillary staff," he added.

For full details on SRMC's budget, go [here](#).