

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Kendall Griffith Steps Down As JFL CEO

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ST. CROIX -- Kendall Griffith announced his resignation as chief executive officer of the Juan F. Luis Hospital on Tuesday at the facility's monthly board meeting. Mr. Griffith had agreed to hold the CEO position until December 31, 2015, which would have given the hospital some time to search for a replacement. Above, Dr. Griffith, left, along with the hospital's Chief Operating Officer Dr. Ken Okolo, who will hold the JFL's CEO position until a new leader is found.

At the board meeting, the doctor, an [interventional cardiologist](#), said his patients were eager for his return. Previously, Mr. Griffith told The Consortium that he would not attempt to retain the CEO position, and that he was satisfied with his efforts at the hospital.

"I was not going to throw my hat in the ring, because I need to take care of my patients. I need to go back to them," Mr. Griffith said in October, when he [accepted the offer to stay at the hospital's helm until December 31](#). "I feel that the board asked me to help stabilize the hospital at a time when things were very bad. I think that, through the support of a great team, I was able to accomplish that, and I think that we were able to put the hospital on a trajectory of growth."

Dr. Griffith owns a private practice here, Cardiovascular Associates of the Virgin Islands, located in Sion Farm. He said he wanted to assure the media that his early exit as CEO was not disciplinary action against him, but rather a personal choice -- wanting to tend his patients, as his practice is in high demand. The venerable doctor also thanked family, friends and the board for their support during his tenure.

Mr. Griffith's resignation [follows that of former Board Chairman Dr. Anthony Ricketts](#), who had already served a maximum three-year term as chairman.

"I appreciate the confidence that was placed in me, and I hope that I did a fair job in advancing the plans of the medical staff," Dr. Ricketts said in October.

He went on: "To my board, thank you all very much. I'm grateful that you all gave me the opportunity, and I'm also very thankful for the emails, texts, voice messages that I used to get a 4:00 a.m.

"My resigning has been made easier by the fact that we have a very strong and competent board, and so with the influx of this competence I'm very sure that we can successfully get through the SIA."

With JFL's checkered past in mind, where it faced constant financial woes and was incessantly under the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) scrutiny, board members praised Dr. Griffith for stabilizing the hospital, asserting that he's leaving the facility in a much stronger position than it was before his selection as CEO on January 26, 2013.

But the hospital saw some trying times and made some glaring mistakes under Mr. Griffith's tenure, the most embarrassing being [the hiring of Nedra Dodds](#), a former metro Atlanta-based plastic surgeon stripped of her medical license in February by the Georgia Composite Medical Board in connection with two patient deaths, who JFL hired as a contract worker. The story ignited a firestorm in the community and led to the [swift termination](#) of the embattled plastic surgeon, but it raised questions about Griffith's leadership.

And there were other failures as well, including the facility's ongoing AC problems, the failure of its generators during an all-day WAPA power outage in April, and other lingering issues.

As for the Systems Improvement Agreement signed between JFL and CMS after the federal agency found the hospital [replete with deficiencies](#), hospital officials now say they're on track to passing with high marks once CMS' inspections are complete.

Yet, some contend the problems highlighted by CMS were present before Mr. Griffith's tenure, even as most of the issues came to light during his leadership.

“I think it’s time for me to step out and give someone else a chance to take it to the next level. And I’m going to be there to help that person, whomever it may be, in anyway that they may need help,” Dr. Griffith went on. “So I’m not going away, I’m still going to be here as a physician, but I’m also going to be there as an asset to the new CEO.”

A [Legal Notice](#) Government House placed on this publication shows the qualifications needed to become the next CEO of JFL. The summary of the requirements reads as follows:

The hospital CEO is assigned onsite CEO-level oversight responsibility for management and operation of a facility under a management agreement with Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital. The CEO provides CEO-level administration, direction, and coordination for hospital activities, with the support of facility and JFL personnel, to carry out the facility’s objectives in the provision of healthcare and the improvement of community health status in a financially appropriate way, and executes policy formulated by the hospital Board of Trustees, in conjunction with JFL, the medical staff and operational entities within the facility.