

The Virgin Islands Consortium

J.F.L. Board Terminates Okolo's C.O.O. Contract

Health / **Published On May 18, 2016 08:23 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- The Juan F. Luis Hospital Board of Directors got rid of Dr. Ken Okolo, above, at an emergency board meeting on Tuesday night, terminating his \$200,000 chief operating officer contract without cause, and stripping him of his signatory and certifying privileges. The board had only last week [terminated his C.E.O. contract](#), a move Board Chairman Troy de Chabert-Schuster said was provoked on advice given by the territorial board to revisit Dr. Okolo's contract.

The board voted unanimously to approve attorney Richard Evangelista's acting C.E.O. position for a \$200,000 annual salary. Mr. Evangelista will remain C.E.O. until a permanent replacement is found. The board voted last week to start a national search for a new chief executive.

The board also voted to give Mr. Evangelista certifying officer privileges, which grants him the authority to sign contracts and issue checks not more than \$100,000 without the consent of the board. J.F.L. certifying officers now including Mr. Evangelista, board member Vera Falu, Assistant Chief Financial Officer Michael Younger, and C.F.O. Tim Lessing, according to a resolution read loudly by board Secretary Aracelis de Hendry Walcott.

The hospital will pay Dr. Okolo two months severance, which equates to \$33,333.

The board's decisions on Tuesday ends what has been a whirlwind journey for Dr. Okolo, who became [J.F.L.'s C.O.O. in February, 2015](#), and was only recently elevated to acting C.E.O. in November, 2016, following former C.E.O. Kendall Griffith's [resignation](#). His acting C.E.O. status was elevated to permanent C.E.O. on February 29, 2016, only to be demoted back to C.O.O., an eventual decision that came following the territorial board's request to revisit Dr. Okolo's contract and renegotiate its terms, including salary. Although the hospital's board had approved Dr. Okolo's contract, the final say for such contracts lies with the territorial board, which had not signed off on Dr. Okolo's contract.

The news of Dr. Okolo's dismissal will serve as a blow to some hospital employees, who had gathered in strong numbers at recent board meetings in a show of solidarity for the beleaguered Okolo.

“We do deserve to know what is going with Dr. Okolo because we liked him,” said Annette Joquin, an emergency room employee during a May 5 board meeting. “You see, we know what we have; we don’t know what we’re going to get.”

She continued: “Whatever you all decide, whatever salary you all give him, we still want him. We want him here, let him finish what he was doing. He started something, let him finish. You can’t just stop driving in the middle of the road and say, ‘no, we don’t want this car no more.’ You have to finish — give him a chance.”