

The Virgin Islands Consortium

J.F.L. Responds To Lack Of E.R. Physicians, Suspends Heart Catheterization Service Due To Equipment Failure

Health / **Published On June 09, 2016 10:20 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **June 09, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- In a response issued late Wednesday, the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center said while the hospital's emergency room is short on doctors, services were never interrupted, and that the facility continues to provide quality care to residents.

"Due to unforeseen circumstances, our coverage is lower than normal, but we are in the process of recruiting more physicians to the [Emergency Department]," said acting CEO Richard Evangelista. "In the interim, the Medical Staff at J.F.L. have stepped in to bridge the gap. Dr. Carmine Williams of the Frederiksted Health Center has also agreed to

provide her services to the E.D. as needed.”

The Consortium [on Wednesday](#) reported that three emergency room physicians had resigned -- one last week and two more on Tuesday -- a scenario that threatened to halt the operation of one of the most critical arms of any hospital.

After well placed sources revealed to this publication what had happened, a Consortium reporter immediately contacted the hospital's Governing Board of Directors Chairman, Troy de Chabert-Schuster, but the chairman said he only knew of one doctor who had resigned a week prior, and had no knowledge of the recent resignations. On Wednesday, however, Mr. Schuster said he was made aware of the latest resignations after speaking to this publication by the hospital's acting CEO Richard Evangelista.

The doctors who resigned were Lorenz Spengler, who left about a week ago after ostensibly receiving a better offer elsewhere, along with Leslie Burton and Jennifer St Croix, both of whom resigned yesterday — even as J.F.L. was scrambling to retain them.

On Wednesday, Senator Kenneth Gittens visited the facility after being told by concerned employees of the occurrence. He met with the two doctors, who relayed to the senator their frustrations.

“I was very concerned when I heard that two of the hospital's emergency room physicians had resigned this week. I was concerned primarily because this not only affects the attention that can be given to each patient but it also affects the workload of other support staff and creates a trickle-down effect of burnout and low morale among them,” Mr. Gittens said.

Mr. Gittens said the physicians cited working long hours, which translates to tiredness and non-competitive salaries as their main reasons for separating from the hospital. He said these are things that can be assessed and corrected in order to ensure consistent quality care for the patients.

“Working in the emergency room is already a very high-stressed assignment. We are compounding the stress levels of the physicians when they are put in situations where they have to work more than their usual 12-hour shifts on a regular basis and at salaries that are not attractive enough to keep them here,” Mr. Gittens said.

Mr. Schuster told The Consortium on Wednesday that the hospital would have locum tenens — physicians who work on a temporary basis — in the E.R. by next week, which he said should remedy the problem; an assurance he said had helped in convincing the last two doctors to stay with the hospital.

J.F.L. also revealed late Wednesday that it had suspended cardiac catheterization services at the Cardiac Center due to the failure of the fluoroscopy machine, which shows an error message that the hospital says needs to be addressed.

The cardiac catheterization lab machine is a Philips Allura Xper FD20/10 X-ray system. It is used for cardiac catheterization, pacemaker placement, and de-clotting of arteriovenous grafts and fistulas. According to the release, J.F.L.'s protocol calls for the use of thrombolytic therapy to treat and stabilize a patient in the event someone presents with the symptoms of a heart attack. If further treatment is required, the patient will be

transferred to the nearest available facility.

Cardiac catheterization is a medical procedure used to diagnose and treat some heart conditions. A long, thin, flexible tube called a catheter is put into a blood vessel in your arm, groin (upper thigh), or neck and threaded to your heart.

The hospital said it brought in the Philips vendor from off-island to perform a routine maintenance check, and was determined by that vendor that additional parts are needed to address the issue. J.F.L. has placed the order, and now await receipt of those parts, according to the release.