

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hiring Physicans For Emergency Room Tops J.F.L. Agenda; Board Discusses Reopening Of Mental Health Ward

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Ernice Gilbert **July 07, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- The Juan F. Luis Hospital Governing Board of Directors met on Wednesday for its monthly board meeting where multiple issues were discussed and actions taken -- among them authorizing Richard Evengista, the hospital's temporary chief executive, to hire three new emergency room physicians and to start negotiations to make permanent two currently working at the facility.

The move follows [recent activity at J.F.L.'s E.R.](#) that saw two emergency room physicians handing their resignations (although they wound up staying in their positions after

discussions to up their pay and provide extra help were had), leaving the E.R. in a precarious position. Other J.F.L. doctors offered to help while the hospital works to rectify the matter.

The negotiations with current E.R. physicians include an annual salary of \$300,000.

Board members also discussed the eventual reopening of the hospital's mental health ward. Mr. Evangelista said he was summoned to appear before Judge Willocks to provide an update on mental health cases here. He had appeared in court four weeks ago and was ordered by a judge to utilize \$1 million received by the hospital to reinstate the program.

The temporary C.E.O. said he issued a request for quote (RFQ) for the renovation of the facility, out of which three persons were chosen. Mr. Evangelista plans on holding a meeting next week to visit the old reconstruction plan of the facility to determine its viability, after which the three persons chosen will be allowed to bid on the project.

Barriers to completion includes a lack of funding to complete renovations -- Mr. Evangelista said the \$1 million will not be enough -- and the subsequent staffing of the facility, a responsibility of the hospital.

"It's not only do we have to bring the building, we have to bring the staff; so sustainability of the staff is another issue," Mr. Evangelista said, adding that he explained the situation to Judge Willocks as well.

But Board Chairman Troy deChabert-Schuster mentioned two hospital grant writers who could help in identifying federal funding. "I know that the money is an issue, but it's such a tremendous need for this community," he said.

The board also modified its moratorium on new hires, allowing for the employment of clinical staff, which includes doctors and nurses, without board approval. In May, the board [enacted a new set of rules](#) that included a freeze on bonuses and new hires, unless they were first vetted by the hospital's Human Resources arm and approved by the board.