

The Virgin Islands Consortium

JFL Issues Generic Statement Following News Of Mold, Falling Ceiling Tiles In Hemodialysis Unit

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ST. CROIX -- The Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center issued a generic, almost nonchalant statement following a silent protest staged by nurses of the facility's hemodialysis unit, which was captured by The Consortium and has [gained over 8,000 views and counting](#), shedding light on a problem that nurses say has been an ongoing issue at the hospital.

"We are working aggressively to address the challenges with our aging facility. The safety of our patients, employees and visitors come first, and our executive management team and maintenance department are working tirelessly to ensure that everyone at JFL is kept in a safe and comfortable environment," reads the statement. "We are committed

to working on a permanent solution to address the ongoing challenges of moisture in the JFL facility.”

The statement gave no information on how soon the problem would be rectified, and it was not specific on what steps were being taken; if only to assuage the affected employees and concerned residents.

The problem is perplexing. For sometime now, excessive condensation from the air conditioner ducts has been leaking onto the floors in the hemodialysis unit and other areas of the hospital. Hospital sources say the pediatrics unit was moved to the intensive care unit because of mold problems.

The nurses staging the silent protest today spoke with The Consortium about falling ceiling tiles and the mold. This has been going on for a while -- even before former CEO Ken Okolo's time, according to an employee who was part of the sit-out.

One employee spoke of suffering with bronchitis because of the mold, and another said her eyes were being affected.

"They keep changing the tiles and in no time the tiles are saturated again, [the tiles] drop down, they put more and the process continues," said one employee, describing the bandaid-like approach the hospital has taken towards the problem.

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"The tiles cave in so often it's not funny. Even in the break room you're not safe. You're eating and tiles would just collapse," said another employee, while yet another made mention of the hemodialysis unit's medication room being at risk because of the ongoing problems.

Senator Kurt Vialet, in a press release issued today, urged the hospital to move quickly on rectifying the matter.

"Senator Vialet is reminding JFL that infections are a leading cause of health risks in chronic hemodialysis patients and strict, specific policies and procedures designed to reduce infection should be implemented. Mold and mildew tends to grow wherever there is excessive condensation and sufficient humidity in the air. Aside from infection risks, the floors may be wet and slippery which can pose a fall risk.

"He is urging the hospital to make the necessary repairs immediately as it can present a clear danger to public health and safety," reads the release.

Senator Kenneth Gittens issued a release of his own: "This morning I met with six employees at the hospital who work in the dialysis unit. The employees informed me of the hazardous situations in the unit that they face daily. They decided to sit-out outside the unit as a silent protest against water leaks in the unit, falling ceiling tiles and mold-related issues. It should never come to this and I support the nurses in their actions, holding those in authority accountable for better working conditions," Mr. Gittens said.

Mr. Gittens said he walked through parts of the unit and saw some of the water-damaged and saturated tiles. He said in other areas of the hospital, he saw contractors and

employees trying to replace saturated ceiling tiles as a 50-gallon bin and a pan was placed in the middle of a hallway to catch leaking water.

"This is certainly unacceptable. I applaud the nurses for taking a stand and must say that speaking with hospital officials, they are working to address the issue at its core. There are plans to insulate or replace leaking equipment, remove and replace saturated tiles, relocate the machines and bring the entire unit back to a condition that is clean and sanitary for the staff and patients," he said.

And Terrence D. Joseph, [who eked out a seventh place spot during the Democratic Primary on Saturday](#), said upon learning of the matter, he went to the hospital and spoke to employees and staff, and was assured that the matter was being handled, and that OSHA was conducting an investigation.

"I have confidence that the Juan F. Luis Hospital's management is taken this issue seriously, and they are doing everything possible to rectify this situation," Mr. Joseph said. "With that being said, all governmental and nongovernmental employees have the legal and moral right to work in safe conditions in a safe environment. It also behooves us to make sure that the place in which our community goes to get better is not a place that can affect their health in other areas. "

The employees said they would report to work on Wednesday morning, stating that they only wanted their cries for help to not only be heard, but that action be taken on their behalf.

"We need to take care of our health first before we can even attempt to take care of others. And that's all what we're saying. Somebody needs to look out for us," said an employee.