

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Three USVI Medical Evacuees Sent To State Of Georgia Have Died; Survivors Express Frustration With Lack Of Communication

Health / **Published On October 12, 2017 10:30 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 12, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- Three of roughly 140 medical evacuees who were sent to various facilities in the state of Georgia following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, have died, according medical assistant working directly with the evacuees providing support. Of the three who died, two were from St. Croix and one from St. Thomas. Additionally, several of those still alive were in intensive care.

The victims' families, Governor Mapp and the Dept. of Health have all been notified of the deaths.

Among those who have died was at least one dialysis patient and an amputee, according to the assistant. And while those who spoke about their situation expressed satisfaction with the healthcare being provided at the medical facilities they were sent to, and praised FEMA for providing adequate housing, they were frustrated with the Virgin Islands government's lack of communication with them, which they say has caused confusion and disappointment.

"I feel like we are the forgotten people and no one has ever inquired how do we feel. I feel like someone should be telling us when we should come home -- I want to come home like yesterday," said one medical evacuee in Atlanta.

The lack of communication and information has also caused depression among some evacuees, and has disheartened the medical professionals in the state of Georgia working with them, said the medical assistant. "They are confused and even though they may be taken care of, they are confused and the lack of sufficient information is stressful to medical evacuees in Atlanta. They want to know why they can't get more information directly from their government," said the assistant, who spoke with The Consortium three times about the situation, and whose identity the publication has chosen to keep anonymous because he was not cleared to speak publicly about the matter.

During a recent press briefing, Department of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis said D.O.H. had been preparing a strategy to return medical evacuees to the USVI. Asked during a following press briefing about her comment, Ms. Davis said the plan was still being prepared, however medical evacuees returning to the territory and still in need of care would be readmitted to mobile hospital units that are to be stationed on the grounds of the Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas, and the Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix. Both Ms. Davis and Mr. Mapp have said that the mobile units will serve as fully equipped hospitals, and will be stationed in the USVI as long as they are needed. The U.S. Department of Defense, working with FEMA, will install the units, according to Mr. Mapp.

But medical evacuees wanted clarification on whether the mobile hospital units will be suited for dialysis patients. Many of them will be watching Mr. Mapp's Friday press briefing closely, hoping that the governor addresses thoroughly their queries, which also include details on when they will be returning home, and why the government has not communicated with them to provide information on developments regarding their placement.

#### **Update: Oct. 12, 2017**

*This story was updated with information regarding the governor's press briefing. The briefing will no longer be held on Thursday, as was first reported in this story. Instead, the press event will be held on Friday.*