

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Directs Hospital Heads To Develop Pre-Evacuation Plan For Patients Before Upcoming Hurricane Season

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp met with hospital officials on Monday relative preparedness plans as the 2018 hurricane season approaches. During his meeting, the governor directed the Department of Health and the territory's hospitals to develop a patient pre-evacuation plan in the event of any major storms, according to Government

House.

Such a plan is critical given the damaged state of Virgin Islands healthcare facilities, he said during the meeting. Although plans for temporary modular structures are underway, it is uncertain how they might withstand a Category 3 or 4 hurricane.

"We have to prepare for the season, but we have to prepare based on the conditions we are in," Mr. Mapp said. The governor said that evacuating Virgin Islanders to Puerto Rico was no longer a viable option. "Puerto Rico is still struggling and we need to ensure our patients will get the best care," he said.

According to Government House, Mr. Mapp requested that relationships be strengthened with Florida hospitals and that bids be put out for air ambulances and other services required in the event of a call for evacuation.

Wanda Reuben, chief executive officer for the Juan F. Luis Hospital (J.F.L.), said her team supported such a plan and was in the process of determining how to categorize patients for possible evacuation, according to Government House. Ms. Reuben also reported that the modular units that will provide dialysis treatment would leave Florida for St. Croix on Tuesday and that she was working hard to ensure that the contract for the groundwork was in place prior to their expected arrival in early May.

Schneider Regional Medical Center (S.R.M.C.) CEO Bernard Wheatley said Monday that he and his team were still evaluating bids submitted to prepare the site for the modular facilities on St. Thomas, which means seven months after the 2017 storms -- and less than two months away from the 2018 hurricane season -- S.R.M.C. officials had yet to settle on a bid to install modular units.

The modular units for the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center, however, are already on their way, Mr. Wheatly said. Mr. Wheatley said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was on St. John last week to finalize preparation for the ten 30 square foot modular buildings.

"These will adequately accommodate the services that were previously housed at Myrah Keating Smith," he said. "The units should be in place by the end of May."

Mr. Wheatley said that a fulltime employee of the Department of Human Services (D.H.S.) is stationed at the hospital in light of the recently approved 100 percent federal reimbursements for patients with Medicaid. According to Government House, the 100 percent reimbursement is among Mr. Mapp's recent achievements on behalf of the territory. Such coverage now allows local hospitals to be fully reimbursed for all medical care provided to uninsured patients. The D.H.S. employee's role is to determine Medicaid eligibility and to assist with registration and claims, Mr. Wheatley said.

Mr. Mapp told hospital officials that they needed at least four employees to assist with Medicaid services.

"They need to be there on nights and weekends when people are coming into the emergency rooms," he said. "They are there to capture dollars to support our health care services. If people aren't enrolled in Medicaid we do not get reimbursed."

The governor encouraged hospital leadership to identify displaced members of their staff who are eligible to apply for these jobs with D.H.S., according to Government House. He reminded those present that the federal government was covering the costs for many positions deemed necessary by the disaster and that workers processing Medicaid registration and claims were included. There are many new quality employment opportunities with the Virgin Islands Government that are considered part of the administrative costs of the recovery, he said.

“These jobs are considered temporary, but temporary is relative,” the governor said. “There are still federally funded positions related to Hurricane Katrina 12 years out. We have opportunities that we have never had before and we must grasp them.”

Government House said Mr. Mapp has worked tirelessly to enact institutional reforms that will improve local healthcare and put the territory on a path to financial solvency. Last year, [the governor was successful](#) in lobbying for the expansion of local eligibility requirements for Medicaid allowing more than 19,000 additional Virgin Islanders to qualify. Locally, Medicaid is known as the Medical Assistance Program or M.A.P.

Department of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis was also among those present at Monday’s meeting. She reported that plans were underway to move her department’s operations into modular units at the site of the current Charles Harwood Medical Complex on St. Croix and adjacent to the hospital on St. Thomas.

Update: *During his press conference today, Mr. Mapp addressed road construction matters, and said he would speak on hospital matters next week.*