

The Virgin Islands Consortium

No Nurses And Doctor At Queen Louise Home For Aged; Employees Plan Protest

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Human Services has been fielding a whirlwind of bad reports as of late, with employees seemingly from all arms of the sprawling department registering complaints.

The latest: since Friday, there has not been a single license nurse at the Queen Louise Home for the Aged, according to a certified nursing assistant who work at the facility, and who requested anonymity in fear of retaliation. The information was confirmed by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, who chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services. The situation has created multiple problematic outcomes for patients and employees alike.

The Department of Human Services has not been responsive to requests for comment.

A majority of the certified nursing assistants at Queen Louise fear their jobs could be in jeopardy, as their certification could be revoked for working outside their scope of practice.

"One might say this is easy but it's hard to comply with when lives of frail, sick, elderly [people] are at stake," said the CNA.

D.H.S. is said to be in arrears on a nursing contract, which forced the contractor, CHG, to remove all licensed nurses from the facility. "Now we the CNAs should not be operating without a supervision of a licensed nurse. These residents require care beyond our scope," the CNA said.

At least one of the 20 CNAs who work at the Queen Louise Home for the Aged has resigned, and a group of them plan to protest the ongoing situation today.

The CNA told The Consortium that a school nurse was placed at the facility to administer medication to the patients, but the nurse was woefully unprepared for the task. "The nurse barely had any training as to the correct protocol," the CNA said.

A meeting was held on Monday with daytime staff, a union president and D.H.S. Commissioner Felicia Blyden. However, a report on the details of the meeting had not been furnished to all staff.

"The board of nursing was made aware of our dilemma and advised us that once there isn't a nurse on duty, it is not safe for us to work with such sick, immobile residents, some on psych medications, nebulizer treatments and awful wounds that get worse by the day from a lack of proper care," this CNA said.

The facility has also been without a doctor from March 23 of this year, according to the CNA.

"Staff are fearful to speak up because senior staff told us we cannot speak to any media, politicians or even the governor," the CNA told The Consortium. "So where does that leave us? We have families to feed, bills to pay."

D.H.S. has been fielding criticisms for the past few months. The department was lambasted for the [handling of a contractual dispute with the Behavioral Services of the Virgin Islands](#), which forced the firm to begin the process of shutting its doors in the territory. Employees of D.H.S.'s Senior Citizens arm [listed a myriad of issues that caused them to take a job action](#); and the department [recently lost \\$1.5 million in federal grants](#) after failing to use the funds -- and failing to request an extension.

On Tuesday, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said the territory has a dozen patients at a facility in Florida called Carlton Palms, which was recently taken over by the state. According to Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, Florida was attempting to work with D.H.S., "but we have been non-responsive so we now have two weeks to move out our patients. They have not notified families," she said.

Feature Image: Queen Louise Home for the Aged in St. Thomas.

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