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Schneider Hospital CEO Admits Vaccine Mandate Policy Must Be Updated; Covid-Related Death of Hospital Employee Announced; Hospital to Launch Drive-Through Testing

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Schneider Regional Medical Center employees and community members protested the hospital's vaccine mandate on Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — Schneider Regional Medical Center Interim CEO, Dr. Luis Amaro, said during a St. Thomas-St. John Hospital Governing Board meeting Wednesday that the Covid-19 vaccine mandate policy needs to be corrected and updated. Earlier in the day, hospital staff and community members protested in front of the medical facility calling for the mandate to be

abandoned.

The policy mandates Covid-19 vaccination for hospital employees. The mandate was discussed with staff and others during a town hall meeting on August 6 and a followup town hall Tuesday. "There was a lot of deliberation, there were those against, those for, those who understood and those who didn't," Dr. Amaro said. A slide presentation he shared during Wednesday's board meeting stated, "The senior leaders support the mandate and continue to work on managing challenges, logistics and staffing concerns regarding to the mandate." Dr. Amaro said he believes what led to the swift backlash was "the mandate, situations regarding termination and regarding the execution of the mandate."

A graph shown in his report revealed that 330 out of 551 S.R.M.C. employees were vaccinated, or 59 percent, while 15 of the 22 employees, or 68 percent, at the Myrah Keating Smith Community Healthcare Center in St. John were vaccinated.

Dr. Amaro shared that an employee of S.R.M.C. died of Covid-19 related causes Tuesday, and 41 employees, including one housekeeper, have tested positive for the virus from the beginning of the year to date. In 2020 there were 23 total positives among employees and two student-nurse employees who tested positive at S.R.M.C. and the Myrah Keating facility on St. John, he revealed.

Dr. Jerry Smith, hospital board member, stated, "I will ask that we extend our deep sympathies to the family of our member of the team that passed away."

Specific changes to the vaccine mandate policy were not discussed before the board went into executive session.

In anticipation of the [requirement for non-vaccinated government employees to be tested weekly](#), and acknowledging the long lines at Department of Health testing sites, Dr. Amaro said the hospital would begin administering drive-through testing.

Once ready, testing will take place Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and a tentative start date is expected to be announced soon. "We are getting all of the logistics together and the preliminary set-up together so that we can run that efficiently," he said. "This will take a lot of the requests for testing out of the emergency room and decongest our emergency room of folks just needing testing."

Dr. Amaro also said the testing effort could create additional revenue for the hospital.

Christopher Borgesen, vice president of operations at S.R.M.C., said a soft run of the drive-through testing effort would take place on August 18. It will include hospital employees, "so we can see how the whole process works, how it functions, [and] any opportunities for improvement."

Mr. Borgesen said with the new government mandate set to take effective Sept. 9, "we might see this increase a bit beyond our dreams, so we're starting small. We do want to make sure that this runs smoothly before we roll it out to the rest of the public."

He said the registration process would take place online as well as through the hospital's business department for those who do not have the ability to register online.

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