

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Names Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar as Founding Dean of UVI School of Medicine

Health / **Published On October 25, 2021 03:11 PM /**

Staff Consortium **October 25, 2021**



Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar. By. THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The University of the Virgin Islands announced Monday the appointment of Virgin Islander, Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar as founding dean of the UVI S. Donald Sussman School of Medicine.

According to the release, the medical school is on track to becoming the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) medical school to be established since 1975 and the only public medical school in the nation. It will also be the first accredited and English-speaking medical school in the Caribbean.

“The journey towards having a medical school has been a long and winding road, with many challenges along the way, as well as numerous milestones of tremendous success,” said UVI President Dr. David Hall. “The appointment of Dr. Hunte-Cesar stands as one of those very successful milestones and the University looks forward to her leadership in getting us to the final destination.”

UVI said it conducted an extensive national search that attracted multiple candidates from the Virgin Islands and abroad. “At the conclusion of our search, Dr. Hunte-Cesar, emerged as the appropriate candidate for this critical position,” said UVI Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Camille McKayle, chair of the search committee. “She is a bright, innovative and dedicated leader in the medical field and someone who can lead this very ambitious and transformative project. She will stand as an inspiration to Virgin Islanders who aspire to pursue a career in medicine and other health related fields.”

“Dr. Hunte-Cesar is extremely well versed in the challenges of the local health care system and profoundly dedicated to leveraging the work of the medical school to improving those weak points,” added Mr. Hall. “We always wanted the medical school to have a research and service focus on public health and infectious diseases. These are the hallmarks of Dr. Hunte-Cesar’s many years of experience. She is the ideal leader to realize our vision for the medical school, especially as it relates to elevating the quality of health care for the people of the Virgin Islands.”

The university also announced that Dr. Benjamin Sachs, who has been with the project from its inception, has agreed to serve as the executive vice dean for academic affairs, and thus work alongside Dr. Hunte-Cesar.

“As a former dean, I know that what matters the most is to be a role model; to inspire the next generation of physicians to provide high quality and compassionate care and to encourage high school students to enter the healing professions. I have no doubt, given her proven leadership in fighting the Covid pandemic, that Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar is the right person to help lead the UVI S. Donald Sussman School of Medicine,” said Dr. Sachs.

Remarking on the appointments, Dr. Emmanuel Graham, president of the Virgin Islands Medical Society said, “The selection of Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar as the founding dean of the UVI Medical School is a game changer. She is the right person at the right time to make the vision reality. The continued involvement and support of Dr. Benjamin Sachs is a major benefit.”

Born and raised on St. Thomas, Dr. Hunte-Cesar, earned her bachelor of science and doctor of medicine degrees at Howard University. She went on to earn a master of science in public health at the University of Miami in 2009, while also completing her residency in Internal Medicine and Global Health Equity at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine and Jackson Memorial Hospital that same year. From 2009 to 2011, Dr. Hunte-Cesar pursued an infectious diseases fellowship at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Returning to the Virgin Islands in 2011 to practice medicine, Dr. Hunte-Cesar worked in several capacities within the V.I. Department of Health including most recently as the

territorial medical director and territorial infectious disease specialist. She has also served as the Virgin Islands Infectious Diseases Staff Physician at the Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas since 2011, and for a period was the hospital's chief of medicine. For her leadership role in the territory during the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr. Hunte-Ceasar received the Virgin Islands Medical Society Physician Recognition Award. She was also recognized as the 2020 Schneider Regional Medical Center Physician of the Year.

"As a local Virgin Islander who returned home to practice medicine, I am incredibly honored to take on this role at the UVI School of Medicine that will provide increased opportunity for Virgin Islanders and other students of the Caribbean to be trained in a cutting edge and innovative setting," said Dr. Hunte-Ceasar. "I am confident that the unique experience that the students will receive will serve as a catalyst for their desire to practice in the territory and to contribute to the sustainability of community and public health by educating our future healthcare professionals. I look forward to leveraging my community building experience to facilitate partnerships across the public and private healthcare networks that will result in increased healthcare outcomes throughout our community."

According to the release, with approval from the Board of Trustees, UVI plans to submit its application for preliminary accreditation to the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) in late November or early December. The university said it hopes to also fill the position of Executive Vice Dean for Administration and Finance prior to the submission of the application.

As currently designed, the UVIS. Donald Sussman School of Medicine facilities will include a state-of-the-art simulation training center on St. Croix, a classroom building that contains an anatomy lab with advanced visualization, a 100-seat lecture hall, and a clinical skills lab. A Biomedical Laboratory facility will also be added to the medical school complex on St. Thomas. The facilities are being supported by funding from the V.I. government and a \$28.6 million grant from the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In June, former UVI Board of Trustees member Donald Sussman [made a \\$6 million, landmark donation](#) to the university for the establishment of the medical school. "Top quality health care for Virgin Islanders will result from a top quality medical school," said philanthropist Donald Sussman, whose lead donation named the medical school. "I cannot imagine a better team than Dr. Hunte-Ceasar as Dean and Dr. Sachs as executive vice dean to fulfill our vision for the medical school."