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Having Practiced Medicine For 21 Years in U.S., Virgin Islands Surgeon Returns Home With Passion to Serve

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Dr. Jamil Jacobs-El. By. FILE PHOTO

The U.S. Virgin Islands is always in need of good physicians, a need that became more acute as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the heightened demand for medical workers. From nurses to doctors and their assistants, the USVI has been paying a premium to hire medical staff in recent times, many of whom leave when their contracts have expired.

In the case of orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jamil Jacobs-El, the story is similar but different. Similar in that the USVI continues to seek physicians and Dr. Jacobs-El is a much-needed addition. Different because unlike those who leave the territory when their contracts are done, Dr. Jacobs-El — who started his employment at Comprehensive Orthopaedic Global this month, a leading firm in the

USVI — is moving home for good.

Dr. Jacobs-El was born in New York City and is the eldest of ten children of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Jacobs-El. The family relocated to Mon Bijou, St. Croix in the mid-1970s, where the second five of the siblings were born. He received his primary and secondary education on St. Croix, and attended the St. Croix Central High School then Good Hope School, graduating salutatorian in 1983. Dr. Jacobs-El spent several years on the St. Croix Dolphins swim team, then competed in cross country and track.

"To come home for me is something that I have been thinking about for several decades and making a full plan for," he told the Consortium in a recent interview. "So to return home for me is like a dream coming to fruition, and a chance to come back and return the favor of education and upbringing that the Virgin Islands gave me."

Dr. Jacobs-El received his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering at Stanford University, CA. He then changed career direction and entered the MD-PhD program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago, with a thesis in molecular and cellular physiology.

His internship and residency in orthopedic surgery was done at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and that was followed by a fellowship at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City.

He has practiced in Durham, North Carolina, and for the last 20 years has taught surgery part-time at Jacobi Medical Center located in Bronx, New York, a Level I trauma center.

Dr. Jacobs-El is completing his 17th year of private practice at now-Advocate Aurora Health Legacy Dreyer Clinic in Aurora, IL in general orthopedic surgery with a focus on adult reconstruction/trauma (hip, knee and shoulder replacement, including complex cases), along with severe trauma.

Dr. Jacobs-El had long planned to return home, but he said one of the mainsprings of the decision was that his children are now adults. "I have a daughter in medical school, and we felt it was time to think about leaving the states and coming back to serve the community after the last fifteen to twenty years of practice, and bring the skills and the experience gained over the last few years back to the people of St. Croix — especially knowing that there is a need," he said.

He is returning home with his spouse Neldy, with whom he shares six adult children and five grandchildren.

Dr. Jacobs-El's work with C.O.G., which started this month, will be part-time through June, "and then the plan is in July to be full-time," he said.

Founder and CEO of C.O.G., Dr. Brian Bacot, described Dr. Jacobs-El as an amazing addition to the team who has a kind and gentle personality. Dr. Bacot also shared that Dr. Jacobs-El trains young physicians. "It's good to have a friend who I can work with and respect for his skillset," said Dr. Bacot, who added that they both have a strong professional network.



Dr. Brian Bacot, founder and CEO of C.O.G. (Credit: V.I. Consortium)

C.O.G. is a leading provider of orthopaedic surgery offering services in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands and other parts of the Caribbean. "Our state-of-the-art facilities include the only ambulatory surgery center to be credentialed by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean," [reads a description](#) on the firm's website.

In 2019 Dr. Bacot [opened the St. Croix Surgical Center](#), which was heralded as a major leap forward for healthcare in the USVI. He said the surgical center, which includes three state-of-the-art operating rooms, was established to meet the needs of Virgin Islanders who have had to travel for care.

"This facility is meant to meet that exact need; that apprehension that you can't get the same kind of quality healthcare that you would stateside," he said at the time. "That's what we've built. We designed it to have all the state-of-the-art equipment in order to provide those services. We've staffed it with highly qualified, specialized physicians who can provide those services, and we've provided it inside a facility that is well structured, well managed, and that will allow for any procedure that can be done in the states to be done here, in an appropriate setting."

The facility is located at the former Innovative Building where Viya currently has its offices, with a suite of medical services all in the same building, collectively called Liberty Medical Development. Among the offerings you'll find C.O.G., the St. Croix OBGYN with Dr. Anne Treasure, VI Oral Surgery with Dr. Horace Griffith, VI Dental, and general surgeon Dr. Renee Georges, among others.

Dr. Bacot described the campus as one also geared toward medical tourism, which he said starts at home by providing care that would cause Virgin Islanders to feel good about receiving certain levels of treatment at home. "Medical tourism number one is keeping those who currently shop for their healthcare off-island, as much as possible on island. Secondly, we look at the people who come and visit us, and we want to be able to say if you dock a cruise ship here, we have safe, valuable and available healthcare for you, where you can go to and receive the services that you want expeditiously and at the same level and quality that you meet anywhere else in the world," Dr. Bacot said.