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UVI Medical School Suffers Setback, With Accrediting Body Citing Insufficient Funding to Maintain Operations

Business / **Published On March 21, 2022 06:18 PM /**

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The Medical School Simulation Center on St. Croix received a \$14.1 million grant from the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The University of the Virgin Islands said Monday that it has suffered a setback in its goal to open the UVI medical school in the territory, following a decision by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education during a meeting last month to keep the medical school in applicant status while withholding what UVI officials hoped would have been a move to candidacy.

UVI said if LCME had granted candidacy status, a site visit would have been triggered.

LCME candidacy status is the first step of a lengthy process to achieve full accreditation. Any new medical education program seeking LCME accreditation must follow a series of steps outlined in the LCME Rules of Procedure document.

Keeping UVI in applicant status means the university failed to meet the threshold set by LMCE to achieve candidacy status. The LCME accredits complete and independent medical education programs whose students are geographically located in the United States or Canada for their education. The LCME is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as the reliable authority for the accreditation of programs of medical education leading to the M.D. degree.

UVI President Dr. David Hall on Monday told the Consortium that the main cause of the setback was LCME's determination that UVI lacked sufficient funding to operate a medical school. "They felt that we did not demonstrate that there were enough resources allocated to the project. They felt that there were some resources that were allocated but they weren't clear that those could be sustained, meaning that they would continue overtime. And then they said there were some funds that we pointed to that they were not clear about the status of the funds," Dr. Hall said.

He said LCME isn't focused on the medical school's ability to earn tuition revenue. Instead, the accrediting body was more concerned about UVI's ability to sustain the medical school financially with funding already secured through other means. "So they're looking at the gifts we had in our application; three gifts that we have received from major donors that totaled approximately \$13 million. They are pointing to other funds that the Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands has that are being [provided] to the medical school that we have raised through investments that come to about \$5 million," Dr. Hall said.

Also of concern to the LCME are in-kind services to be provided to the medical school by physicians who will participate in the teaching of the clinicals. "And so [LCME] had questions about that as well," Dr. Hall said. He said LCME did not indicate a funding threshold that would be satisfactory. "Then they have no way of being able to say no if they want to say no, so they don't do it in that way. And since we've been dealing with this they've never said you got to have X amount. We create a budget and then we show them that we have the money to match that budget.. so they are responding to the budget we presented and raising questions about the sufficiency, sustainable and status of some of those resources," he said.

Under LCME rules, the university has 12 to 18 months to address the concerns stated and reapply as an applicant, Dr. Hall said. He said the university has created an ad hoc committee to address the LCME's concerns, and that the committee was in the early stages of deciding adjustments to the 900-page submission.

The ad hoc committee is made up of members of the UVI Board of Trustees and the Foundation for the University of the Virgin Islands Board of Directors, according to UVI. "The board, and thus the university, remain resolute in the belief that a medical school in the Virgin Islands is critical to the health and economic future of the Territory," UVI stated in a release issued today.

Dr. Hall said LCME raised no concerns about the curriculum, faculty, facilities, policies or other critical aspects of the medical school's application. And some of the LCME's concerns "can be easily fixed with additional documentation," he said.

"But I think we need to figure out how to have more resources when we respond to them," Dr. Hall added, referring to funding. He said UVI "will work with private donors, federal agencies, and other institutions to enhance the resources associated with the project."

One aspect of the medical school project remains on track for implementation. The Medical School Simulation Center located on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix is scheduled to become operational in late June or early July. Dr. Hall said the center will operate as a stand-alone unit in the meantime providing a number of services.

"The only difference is we won't be able to train students there because the students will not have been admitted into the medical school, and that's the difference," he said. "But we will still be able to do all of the types of training that physicians need, that nurses, EMTs, the military, etc [need]. We can even train our nursing students there; we just will not be able to train the medical students there which is part of [the simulation center's] function until the medical school actually opens."

Attorney Henry Smock, chairman of the Board of Trustees and chair of the ad hoc committee, stated, "The news was disappointing, especially because of the enormous work of the medical school leadership team and the administration, but our resolve remains firm, and the committee will work closely with the administration to analyze and assess the project and determine next steps."

The Medical School Simulation Center received a \$14.1 million grant from the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The facility will provide comprehensive cutting-edge training for existing physicians, nurses and other medical professionals, UVI said. The Medical Research and Training Center on the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas will be completed this year, while a separate, biomedical facility also on St. Thomas will be completed in 2023, Dr. Hall said. The facilities received a \$18.6 million grant from the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.