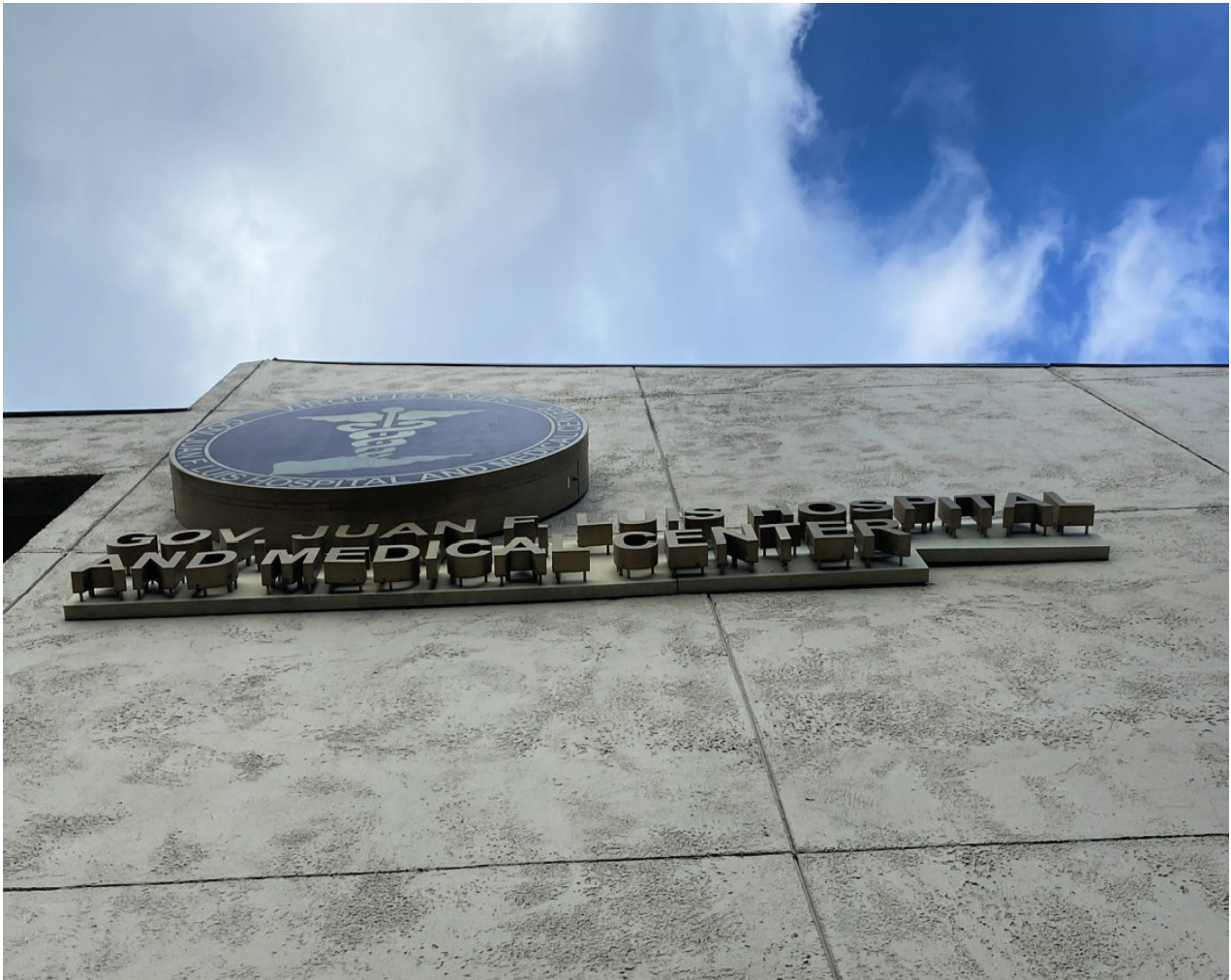


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Juan Luis Hospital Plagued With Staff Shortages as Officials Look to Open JFL North in August

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Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center logo. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Executives at the Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center have been told that they need to engage in an aggressive recruitment campaign to fill dozens of jobs that were left vacant during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Douglas Koch, the recently hired chief executive officer said the hospital currently needs around 70 nurses.

“Right now, what we’re doing is that we’re filling in those positions with different agency nursing staff. Most of those are now being provided by the Department of Health,” he said.

The hospital has an existing compliment of 54 agency staff or travel nurses which includes only one active anesthesiologist. The facility has no operating MRI unit or cardiac center and uses an outsourced private dialysis clinic to treat its patients. The CEO said an interventional cardiologist is also needed.

Additionally, Terry Lynch, acting chief of Human Resources said hundreds of patients are flown out each year for cardiac treatment.

“For 2021, we had a total of 231; for 2022, from January to May we had a total of 114,” she said, noting that a majority of the transfers were for trauma, neuro and cardiac.

The good news is that after five years, cardiac services will be available when the new JFL North facility opens, with the new tentative date being August. JFL North is 60 percent complete and is expected to be able to treat and care for patients by August 2022.

“We have already implemented various stages of that transition plan and we’ve conducted several table top exercises,” shared Gregory Bryant, chief information officer at JFL.

“Within the next month I would say that we are actually going to start have our first actual live transition exercise where we’ll simulate the movement of a patient, patient records, the whole nine yards that’s going to be associated with that transition,” he continued.

Meanwhile, chair of the Committee on Finance, Senator Kurt Vialet was livid over how dialysis services are currently being processed and asked for a change that would serve patients and save the hospital money.

"My issue with having it all privatized [is that] we have undocumented immigrants that have been in the Virgin Islands that need dialysis care and will be refused by private institutions and they go to the hospital and they don't qualify for Medicare and they must be taken care of some place. And that is why it is important for the hospital to always have a small dialysis unit," he stressed.

JFL, formerly a full-service facility serving as the only hospital on the island of St. Croix, covers outpatient services following the 2017 hurricanes.

The facility which previously offered 188 beds now has a total of 57 available and only two operating rooms in use. The hospital lost 50 percent of inpatient capacity due to the closure of the third floor.

The governor has recommended a General Fund Appropriation of \$27,250,000 for the fiscal year 2023. This represents an increase of \$500,000 above the amount for 2022 appropriation of \$26,750,000. The hospital also expects a 100% Federal Match for Medicaid.