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New Dialysis Clinic on St. Croix Set to Open in Coming Months

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A dialysis machine. By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Healthcare Foundation announced Thursday that the long-anticipated opening of its nonprofit dialysis clinic located in the Annex of the Sunny Isles Shopping Center on St. Croix, has been scheduled for fall 2022 (between Sept. 1-Nov. 30).

According to the release, construction began in April 2022 on the 13-station dialysis unit. "The clinic will provide lifesaving dialysis treatments for up to 78 patients when fully operational," VIHCF said.

VIHCF was established in 2018 and has remained steadfast in its commitment to serve the dialysis community, according to the release.

"The critical need to create a stable sustainable center has been ongoing in the aftermath of the hurricanes. However, the urgency accelerated in August 2021 when the dialysis trailer at the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital was put on notice for its certification," the nonprofit said.

"Although the Hemodialysis team at the hospital has been doing a phenomenal job, the CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) certification was granted for a time-limited under "extraordinary circumstances" in 2018. This "special consideration" allowed evacuated patients to return home to receive their life saving treatments in the trailer, until a permanent solution could be found."

VIHCF said it has partnered with the well-reputed Dialysis Clinic, Inc. (DCI), which is the nation's largest nonprofit dialysis provider, to operate and manage its new dialysis clinic. DCI was founded in 1971 by Dr. Keith Johnson in Nashville, TN at a time when he faced challenges not unlike ours - "too few resources to meet so many needs". DCI now has over 250 outpatient dialysis centers across the country and employs approximately 5,000 people serving more than 14,000 patients with kidney failure.

Dr. Johnson visited St. Croix and St. Thomas with his executive team in 2018 after he learned of the plight of evacuees receiving treatments in DCI centers since September 2017, according to the release. He discovered that for over a year they had been housed in hotel rooms and could not come home because there was not enough outpatient dialysis units to accommodate them safely. He contacted the local doctors to find out how DCI could help the situation.

"And so began the gift of this collaboration which promises to benefit our dialysis community tremendously, VIHCF said. "Patients may be able to qualify for programs in the future, such as home dialysis and peritoneal dialysis, which are currently unavailable in the territory of the Virgin Islands. They can also plan their travel to the mainland for leisure or specialty medical care, including transplantation, with access to DCI's many dialysis units across the country. Access to continued education, workshops and training programs for our staff will improve confidence, quality and performance, and create better career opportunities on island."

According to the release, the new clinic will provide not only safe reliable treatments, but also aims to fulfill ancillary needs of dialysis patients, such as guidance through the complex healthcare journey, dietetic services, mental health counseling, disease prevention education, dialysis access surveillance, and coordination of all related needs. Based on the United States Renal Data System (USRDS) the incidence of kidney failure is rising and the need for dialysis is increasing all over the country, not just in our territory. The nonprofit foundation said it aims to deliver these critical services to our underserved population in a challenging environment of rising healthcare costs and decreasing payments for dialysis.

VIHCF said it began raising funds and acquire specialized equipment for this audacious goal through a grass roots movement of donations. Federal grant awarded funds helped secure telehealth capabilities and information technology systems. In September 2021, the foundation met with Governor Albert Bryan to seek funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). According to the release, Mr. Bryan understood the dire need and recommended VIHCF apply to the VI Office of Budget for a grant from ARPA. On November 11, 2021, the Foundation qualified and was awarded a \$1 million grant, which opened the way to securing contracts for the build-out. However, this amount will not be enough to open the doors, VIHCF said.

"First the Covid pandemic and now the tumultuous global events have caused an economic crisis across the planet," stated the release. "The VIHCF is facing challenges of increased costs of fuel and materials, limited resources, and delayed timelines due to supply chain issues. An added

urgency to open is the risk hurricane season poses to the tenuous structure of the trailer in which patients currently receive their treatments. If evacuation does become necessary again, patients can now feel confident that they will come home to a fully operational, state-of-the-art dialysis clinic."

VIHCF said it will be hosting a construction progress event on Sunday, July 31st from 2-4 p.m. to showcase the build-out that is underway at the Dialysis Clinic. Mr. Bryan as well as several community partners will be attending. The event will be held at the Annex of the Sunny Isles Shopping Center across from the WAPA business office.

The nonprofit will also be sharing details about its efforts and resources to support dialysis patients and their caregivers with Emergency Preparedness Plans in collaboration with V.I. American Red Cross.

"VIHCF is incredibly grateful for the community's continued generous support," stated the release. "The gift of each donation, any amount no matter how small, goes toward the opening of this clinic - a critical need that vastly impacts the lives of those struck down by kidney failure, dependent on this life-sustaining treatment. Only fate separates us. And one never knows when fate may change, and dialysis may become a need for anyone of us." Visit their website [here](#).

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