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Following First Successful Kidney Transplant in BVI, Calls for Transplants to be Covered by Government

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BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS — The BVI government could save millions of dollars in the long term if kidney transplants were covered by its National Health Insurance system, according to Dr. Heskith Vanterpool of the privately-owned Bougainvillea Clinic in Road Town.

But Minister for Health and Social Development Carvin Malone is of the view that in this case, savings is relative.

Kidney transplants are performed on patients with kidney failure. The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs in the renal system that help the body pass waste as urine and filter blood before sending it back to the heart.

The two leading causes of kidney failure are diabetes and high blood pressure. Persons with kidney disease need dialysis or a kidney transplant.

Prior to December 7th, 2019, kidney transplants were not done in the BVI. But in a groundbreaking move, Dr. Vanterpool's Bougainvillea Clinic facilitated a team of 9 doctors and other medical professionals who successfully performed this procedure on a man who had both kidneys damaged because of uncontrolled high blood pressure.

The patient, Neville Salmon, received a kidney from his son Nico and both patients are living normal lives as of this date.

“Both patients only lost minimal blood and never needed blood transfusion or to go into the Intensive Care Unit ICU,” Dr. Vanterpool reported. “They were basically nursed in private rooms with the donor going home after two days and the recipient four days.”

(Dr. D-Orlando Smith Hospital and Bougainvillea Clinic in the BVI)



There are currently 57 patients on dialysis being treated at the government's Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital. Patients require three treatments per week. Each cost \$600 amounting to close to \$100,000 per patient per year or an estimated total of \$6m annually.

The one-time cost for the procedure at Bougainvillea is about \$60,000. Then additional monies are needed for follow up doctor's visits for a year and the necessary anti rejection medication

As it stands, the government's National Health Insurance does not cover kidney transplants. NHI does cover an annual maximum of \$70,000 for hemodialysis locally and up to a maximum of 12 sessions overseas, with pre-authorisation.

Health Minister Malone stopped short of specifically addressing Dr. Vanterpool's claim that government stands to save millions if government facilitated kidney transplants locally. He said the entire health care service, including NHI, is being reviewed and no finite decisions will be made until this is done.

The BVI government minister told VI Consortium, "The aim is to ensure that the healthcare system is respected and beneficial to all."

Dr. Vanterpool maintains that one of the most effective ways to treat kidney failure is a transplant, as patients would come off dialysis and save the system money and their quality of life would dramatically improve for themselves and their family members who are caretakers.

"So, it should be one of the approaches our healthcare system uses to handle the epidemic of kidney problems we have in the BVI," he charged.

Dr. Heskith Vanterpool is the owner of Bougainvillea Clinic and Eureka Medical Clinic, which together offer in patient and out patient state-of-the-art medical services to residents and visitors.

Doctors specialize in Orthopedic Surgery, Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery, Dermatology, Medical Microdermabrasion, Chemical Peels, Acne Treatment and Laser Skin Procedures, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Neurosurgical Procedures, Urologic Surgery, Gynecology, General Surgery, Cardiology, General and Internal Medicine, Physiotherapy, Imaging and Urgent Health Care Needs.