

SMMC signs USD 25 million grant agreement with World Bank

CAYHILL: The St. Maarten Medical Center (SMMC) has signed an agreement to receive a USD 25 million grant from the St. Maarten Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience Trust Fund that is funded by The Netherlands and managed by the World Bank. The grant will serve to improve services of the current hospital, while the new hospital is being built, and to upgrade the design of the new hospital to withstand category 5+ hurricanes. This with the overall objective to improve the preparedness and capacity of hospital services in St. Maarten.

SMMC General Director Kees Klarenbeek is elated with the grant and is very grateful to the Government of the Netherlands, the World Bank and the Government of St. Maarten for the allocation of the funding. Klarenbeek is convinced that the new hospital will greatly reduce the discomfort of patients having to travel abroad because of non-availability of certain medical services on-island. “By now investing in certain critical upgrades to the existing facility and the Care Complex - the latter will remain to exist after completion of the new hospital building - we can continue to introduce new medical specialties. This will significantly reduce the number of patients that are currently sent abroad and is in line with all health stakeholders’ mission of providing quality care, close to home”, Klarenbeek stated.

Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labor (VSA), the honorable Emil Lee, stated: “I am happy with the obvious benefits of strengthening the new hospital, reinforcement of the current SMMC and the support to achieve the Joint Commission International’s (JCI) ^[1] health care standards and accreditation. But there are additional benefits, the validation that our procurement procedures for the construction of the new hospital meet rigorous international standards, which brings status and confidence to the entire project”. “In addition to the funds, the grant also comes with the supervision and technical expertise of the World Bank which are both valued and appreciated”, Lee continued. “This is another tremendous step forward towards our anticipated start of the construction of the new general hospital later this year. Thanks to the members of the health Tripartite (SZV, SMMC and VSA), Government of St. Maarten, the World Bank team and support from the Netherlands for all of their efforts to secure this grant”, Lee concluded.

The structure of the existing hospital was damaged and weakened by Hurricane Irma. As a result, priority has been given to essential upgrades to the current hospital which will ensure continuity of services and improve the hospital’s preparedness and capacity for future extreme weather conditions, particularly during the period that the new hospital is being built. While the new hospital will provide a state-of-the-art medical complex, final delivery of the new hospital will take place several years from now. With the upgrades to the existing facility taking place over the next year, patients will not have to wait until the new facility is completed and can benefit from an expanded scope of services. These investments to the current building compared to the reduction in the costs of overseas medical referrals are absolutely worth the effort. A start has already been made on the reinforcement of existing hospital’s roof in order to increase its resiliency to future storms.

Both Minister Emil Lee and Kees Klarenbeek thank the teams of the World Bank, the Interim Recovery Committee, the Ministry of VSA and SMMC for their tremendous commitment leading to this important agreement for St. Maarten.

^[1] JCI is the oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care in the United States. <https://www.jointcommissioninternational.org>