

Owen King EU Hospital, Saint Lucia - Naming Ceremony

HoD's Speech - Sunday February 21st 2016 – 15:00

H.E. the Governor General, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, The King family (I'm honoured that the EU will share a hospitals' name with you), Ambassadors, distinguished guests, I am extremely pleased that we have gotten this far! Today's ceremony signifies a major milestone in the long journey from an idea to construction of this **state of the art hospital** to the full functioning and operation of health services for the people of St. Lucia, the wider Caribbean and beyond. I dare to say that the hardware is sometimes the soft part whereas the software element can be in fact a harder nut to crack. Once the equipment is installed and staff trained the human and financial resources should follow swiftly in the coming months. This will no doubt be a very demanding exercise for the government, which must make sure it matches the legitimate demands of Saint Lucian citizens for good public services, in this case health care.

This process has been a partnership between the European Union and the Government of St. Lucia. However, recently as we look towards the opening of the Owen King EU Hospital and its future, we have to welcome the partnership developed with **France** (and I acknowledge the presence of the French Ambassador Eric de la Moussaye), the **French Region of Martinique** and the Pan-American Health Organisation (**PAHO**). These new partners have a role to play in the continued capacity building and training of the health professionals in the use and maintenance of the equipment, and in the adoption of new health care practices, in critical areas such as sterilisation, radiology and others.

As we come to the end of this EU funded project in the next few months, these partnerships will become even more important. The EU has made a tremendous contribution to the health sector (both primary and secondary health care), well above 40 million Euros (well over EC\$ 160 million). Nevertheless, I encourage the Government to take a **collaborative and synergistic approach** with donor agencies to address the issues around sustainability, continued capacity building of health care workers and

continued quality improvement of health services standards and health services.

The **economic viability** of the Owen King EU Hospital is central to the sustainability of the hospital and quality of services available. The EU is currently supporting the government to develop strategies and policies for the sustainable financing of the health sector, and I know that the issue of the economic viability of this hospital is foremost on the minds of bureaucrats and lay persons alike. The health sector is often viewed as a burden on a given country, as it requires too much from the government's treasury while contributing little or nothing to the fund. However, the quality of the facility, equipment and staff of the Owen King EU Hospital holds enormous potential for the hospital to earn a considerable income and be self-sustaining. I encourage the government to be creative in its approach to income generation of the hospital. **Public Private Partnerships (PPP)** and Service Level Agreements have proven successful in other countries to open up the health care market and make it attractive also for insurance companies and tourists. In my view, whatever options government choose should not add an undue burden or restricts access to secondary health services to those most in need.

Finally, this state of the art hospital in St. Lucia bodes well for the **regionalisation of health care**. No one country in the region can offer all the health services needed by its people. Similarly, to St. Lucians accessing available health services in Martinique, it should not be surprising that citizens of other Caribbean countries will access health services in St. Lucia. I believe that the time has come for the government of St. Lucia and the **OECS** to take a definitive step to identify the specialisation in which St. Lucia can develop as a **Centre of Excellence** in health care as part of a future regional network. This is even more critical as the region faces disease burden from Non Communicable Diseases and emerging threats, such as Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika viruses from mosquito vector. St. Lucia will scale up its health management information system with the support of the EU. Consequently St. Lucia should be in good position to take a lead in discussions around the **regionalisation of the health information management** as this is critical for the linking people,

health services and health services payment for the provision of cross border health care.

We encourage efficient and proactive project management, always trying to anticipate what can possibly go wrong and address it urgently. The EU will continue, where we can, to support you during these final stages to equipping, transitioning and opening of the Owen King - EU Hospital.

In short, on behalf of the European Union I'm proud of our €40 million contribution to this magnificent hospital, and being part of its **name**. For the sake of the people of St. Lucia, the government must now make sure that the hospital is **opened within a few months**. The government also needs to ensure, with help from the EU and other partners such as France, the Region of Martinique and PAHO, that the hospital has a **sustainable future**, hopefully also benefitting St. Lucia's neighbours in the region.

I can't wait to take part in the opening. All I need is for the Prime Minister to give me a date. With reference to the hospital choir: "there ain't no mountain high enough" to keep me away from the forthcoming opening, as long as it is before 1 September 2016. Judging from the singing today, we now know that the performance will be second to none. I have one question for you: does the hospital staff sing like that during open heart surgery 😊? It must have a strong curative effect 😊.

Thank You