



STATEMENT

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February 22, 2021 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The Mandeville Regional Hospital (MRH) in Manchester wishes to refute statements in the article, titled, "Medical interns bawling out", published by the Jamaica Observer, Sunday, February 21, 2020. It is unfortunate that no member of MRH management was contacted for a response before the article was published.

Senior Medical Officer at the MRH, Dr. Everton McIntosh explained that among the allegations that the Medical Interns made is the scheduling of the interns to conduct COVID-19 swabs without being fit-tested for adequate personal protective equipment (PPE)."

"I went to great pains to explain to the interns that fit-testing is the ideal but that fit-testing is not currently available. Virtually all staff at the MRH and at other hospitals around the island are using N95 masks which were not fit-tested because of the global shortage of specific sizes to fit all faces, and we just have to do the best with what we have until the matter can be addressed. So they are by no means unique in this matter and all of us as doctors and nurses are in the same situation, and there is no evidence to suggest that anyone has contracted COVID-19 due to the use of non-fit-tested N95 masks", Dr. McIntosh explained.

He added that there are more than 80 staff members at the MRH currently conducting swabbing and the 34 interns are a small fraction of more than 400 team members across the Southern Regional Health Authority who are conducting swabbing. In addition to Interns, Medical Residents, Senior House Officers and Nurses are also involved in the general swabbing of patients.

The medical interns were asked to participate in swabbing in-patients to facilitate increased testing required to fulfill the mandatory testing for all patients in hospital. It is public knowledge that there has been an upsurge in COVID-19 cases in Manchester and all hands are needed on deck.

Dr. McIntosh explained that his comments about contracting COVID-19 twice was misrepresented, as "my response to that query was to say that
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there have been isolated cases reported, on which the jury was still out as to whether these were genuine re-infections versus persons who developed another respiratory illness while still shedding non-viable COVID viral particles, a situation which can cause a person to continue testing positive for COVID-19 for months even though they are no longer having an infection. I stand corrected if this is not so.”

“I did say to them that it was unfortunate that they had chosen this dangerous path at such an early point in their careers, in the context that poor attitudes and bad habits that if fostered will become hard to break and will likely follow them throughout their careers with adverse impacts on their career development. Recruiters from abroad for instance, place great emphasis on things like work ethic, reliability, integrity, respect for others and being a good team player. Sadly, these qualities are not very evident at this time. The MRH takes the safety and wellbeing of all our stakeholders seriously, whether staff, patients or visitors. That goes doubly for the interns as we are cognizant of our responsibility for nurturing them and helping to guide them into realizing their potential as great physicians” Dr. McIntosh further added.

The interns were the logical choice to facilitate the increased testing required to fulfill the mandatory testing for all patients in hospital, due to their large numbers and the fact that rostering two of them per day, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., would not significantly impact their other functions. This works out to each intern being assigned to swabbing twice per month. Interns are not utilized on the COVID Isolation Ward for any reason.

The duty roster in question “with only interns on it” is just a mechanism to facilitate the smooth assignment of the interns on a daily basis, and does not represent the sum total of swabbing in the hospital as other doctors and nurses on the wards and in the Accident and Emergency Department will and do swab patients.

The SMO explained that only one intern had contracted COVID-19 and this pertains to a 2020 incident where a child with a heart problem had cardiac arrest and an intern attempted resuscitation. At the time the child was not considered COVID-19 positive and this was only subsequently discovered when the results of the routine surveillance came back. There has been no such incident since the interns have been asked to perform COVID-19

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swabbing.

All staff including Medical Interns may be exposed to COVID-19 patients on general wards prior to such patients being confirmed and relocated to the isolation ward. All staff members are required to take precautions when seeing all patients by wearing the provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The MRH recently surpassed its original isolation ward capacity; however, several measures were implemented to handle the increase in hospitalization of suspected COVID-19 patients, including housing of COVID-19 patients in newly designated isolation side rooms and controlled areas on select wards. The provision of additional isolation space is in progress with the repurposing of the Paediatric Ward to accommodate 16 beds, which is a part of the hospital's COVID-19 Surge Plan.

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