



Emancipation & Independence Celebrations August 1-6



Improvement in Service Since NHF Takeover of Public Pharmacies

By [Garfield L. Angus](#) August 4, 2014



Photo by: JIS Photographer

Senior Medical Officer at the Bustamante Hospital for Children, Dr. Michelle-Anne Dawson (right), converses with (from left): Chief Executive Officer, Anthony Wood; Pharmacist Nickesha Lewars-O'Conner; and Acting Director of Nursing Services at the hospital, Audrey Willocks in the waiting

area of the hospital's pharmacy, which was recently refurbished as part of a \$37 million improvement project being undertaken by the National Health Fund (NHF).

Story Highlights

The public pharmacy system is being transformed with reduced waiting time for the filling of prescriptions, expansion and upgrading of facilities, hiring of more pharmacists, and provision of modern equipment.

The improvement is a result of a \$37 million project by the National Health Fund (NHF) to take over the operations of pharmacies in public health facilities.

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The Bustamante Hospital for Children in St. Andrew, and the St. Mary-based Port Maria Hospital, were the first to come under NHF management, with the agency taking over operations at the Percy Junor Hospital in Clarendon on June 30.

All pharmacies were renovated prior to the official takeover, to include increasing the number of dispensing windows, expansion or refurbishment of waiting areas, installing new equipment, and the addition of confidential areas to facilitate private consultations between patients and pharmacists.

One satisfied customer is Jasmine Wilkinson, who visits the Percy Junor Hospital monthly, to collect her mother's medication. She tells *JIS News* that she says she no longer has to wait an hour or more for service.

She recounts that on her last visit on her July 29, "I went at 10 'o clock and my medication was ready in no time. I did not have to wait; as I came I got a number, and it was ready. I thank those, who installed the method, and we will work with the pharmacist, who is doing a good job," she says.

The improvement project also involves the extension of opening hours. Chief Executive Officer at the Percy Junor Hospital, Earl McLaughlin, tells *JIS News* that the previous opening hours were 8:30 am to 4:30 pm from Monday to Thursday; 8:30 am to 4:00 pm on Friday; and 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturdays, while the facility was closed to the public on Sundays.

"The change is awesome, we have 7:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday to Friday; Saturday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm; and on Sundays we are open to the public from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm," he outlines. He notes further that under the old system, clients had to be at the hospital from as early as 4:00 am, and there was a cut off time for receipt of prescriptions.

"And, when those prescriptions came in, we could only take a limited amount. Now, patients are coming in at 4:45 pm and ... they are going to get through," Mr. McLaughlin states.

He tells *JIS News* that with the improvements, he no longer hear the frustrations being expressed by clients.

"My office is very close to the pharmacy and my ears... it was a very challenging situation, but, now I can't hear any noise out there. They are very satisfied, they get through on time."

Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, says he had to institute the new system, because for a very long time, there was a shortage of pharmacist, with their functions being carried in some cases, by pharmacy technicians.

He says the system will be moving from 50 pharmacists to almost 155, with increased remuneration, and better terms and security of tenure.

"In the transition, the NHF has been fixing up all of the pharmacies, and from almost three hours of waiting time, we are now between 20 to 35 minutes. Our next major rollout is going to be the Kingston Public Hospital, and the Victoria Jubilee Hospital. They are in the process of renovation and preparation for th

takeover,” the Minister informs.

He states that the takeover is being done on a phased basis, so that lessons will be learned, and the process can be best managed. Minister Ferguson says a key component of the training is in customer service, and the Ministry has taken a firm position that as patients receive improved care, they must be given respect at the institutions.

Noting that the project should be completed over the next 12 to 18 months, Minister Ferguson says when all the hospitals are fully transitioned, the health centres “will also be taken over in a way that will see better service.”

Chief Executive Officer of the NHF, Everton Anderson, informs **JIS News** that a Pharmacy and Inventory Management System is being installed and new pharmacists employed.

These initiatives will provide a more pleasant experience for patients including significant reduction in waiting time, improve working environment for staff and ensure compliance with Pharmacy Council of Jamaica regulations.

He adds that with the takeover of the pharmacies, “we have been focusing on training and learning from each other as we try to improve the service, so we are training our staff in managing pharmacy operations and overall patient care, with the expectation that this will translate into a much improved service for our patients.”

Chief Executive Officer of the Port Maria Hospital, Althea Gardener, says that since the takeover of operations by the NHF, “we noted that the averages seen have increased, the opening hours extended, and improvement to the waiting area.”

“There is an intercom system in place, an electronic ticketing system, and a confidential area is there. The aesthetic of the pharmacy is improving, and we now have a pharmacist, and the dissatisfaction that we used to hear from patients, we are no longer hearing them,” she further informs.

For his part, Chief Executive Officer at the Bustamante Hospital for Children, Anthony Wood, informs that customer service has improved significantly.

“The look and feel of the area has improved, and the waiting time has lessened. The pharmacy is working much better, and it is a good idea, and a collaborative effort,” he tells **JIS News**.
