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## **GRENADINES HEALTH INSTITUTIONS TO RECEIVE POINT OF CARE EQUIPMENT**

District Medical Officer of Health Dr. Roger Duncan has announced that they have begun to streamline their services and have submitted for inclusion in the next budget a request for the acquisition of point of care testing equipment.

Dr. Duncan made the announcement at the ceremony to officially hand over a medical evacuation vessel to the Coast Guard. According to Dr. Duncan, the testing equipment will rule out critical cases thus medical staff will “be able to differentiate who’s having a heart attack and those not having a heart attack.” The District Medical Officer thanked Commander Cain and his team at the Coast Guard for the evacuations conducted thus far “safely... no injury or loss of life.”

The medical evacuation vessel is the newest addition to the St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ Coast Guard fleet, SVG 05 Balliceaux. The vessel, equipped with firefighting capability, will

assist residents of the Grenadines, and others in need of urgent medical care and on sea emergencies. The vessel was acquired at a cost of over US \$1.6 million from the Damen Shipyards Group in Holland.

Commander of the Coast Guard Mr. Brenton Cain said the current boats used to transport persons in need of medical care are not suited to the task. “So this challenge was routed to the Ministry of National Security and we were told to source a suitable vessel for the mission of medical evacuation. The Government did not hesitate to support this idea,” Commander Cain stated.

Commissioner of the Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force Colin John disclosed that thus far they have conducted over 80 evacuations — “52% from Bequia, 22% from Canouan, 19% from Union [Island] and the rest between Mayreau and mainland St. Vincent and the Grenadines.”

Minister of Finance Hon. Camillo Gonsalves, said the PM as Minister of National Security has made it his business to invest in the Coast Guard. The Minister of Finance said the vessel’s hand over is a day for celebration. “We have more fisher folk that will be working in between our islands because we’re investing in fisheries so we have to also improve our Coast Guard Services... And I want to thank the Hon. Prime Minister for the very significant vision and investment that he’s placed in that regard,” Minister Gonsalves stated.

“I want the Garifuna to hear why we chose the Balliceaux. The Balliceaux for us is not simply a rocky Island out there... but Balliceaux means something to our Nation, to our soul, to our spirit, to our civilisation,” Prime Minister Dr. The Hon. Ralph Gonsalves explained.

Prime Minister Gonsalves stated that there are a couple of things on the SVG 05 Balliceaux to be fine-tuned before its commissioning. “One or two things slip them but it ain’t go slip us so we have asked them to come and correct a couple of things,” Prime Minister stated.

The Minister of National Security further disclosed that Coast Guard staff will be trained in Emergency Medical Technician course to be facilitated by Damen Shipyards Group. “Those who are going to be aboard the vessel not only have to know how to operate the vessel — you have to know how to deal with the patients who are brought on aboard the vessel,” Dr. Gonsalves said.

The medical evacuation vessel, an initiative of the Ministry of National security, Air and Sea Port Development, is a Stan Patrol (SPa) vessel 1605 which was handed over on Thursday, 15th October, 2020 at the Coast Guard Base, Calliaqua.