Responding to Public Health Emergencies-
Lessons from Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak

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The current Ebola epidemic in the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is unlike any we have seen since the disease was first identified in the 1970s. It is by far larger in terms of numbers, geographic spread, but also more unpredictable in the behaviour of its spread than any other previous outbreak¹.

In the present era of jet travel, there is high potential for international spread of a disease like ebola virus disease and hence calls for a concerted global response led by WHO. Ever since the reporting of first case on 26 December 2013 from Guinea, there has been a coordinated effort from various UN agencies and member states in an effort to check the spread of ebola virus disease.

WHO has been working with partners to build Ebola treatment centres (ETCs) and community care centres (CCCs) so that patients can be given care to increase their chances of survival. WHO had been helping engage with communities. This enables communities to recognize the symptoms of Ebola early and move their family members to care so they do not infect others in the family or community. WHO has been providing curricula for multiple partners on trainings in the field on case management, contact tracing, safe and dignified burials and social mobilization. WHO is also playing a key role in providing trainings on contact tracing and working the Governments of France, United Kingdom, USA to train thousands in the classroom and in simulation.²

A high level meeting on strengthening health systems in Ebola-affected countries has brought out certain important issues like stressing on integrated care rather than isolated programmes as the best approach to strengthening health systems, and that Universal Health Coverage, where it has been achieved, has made such integrated approaches practical and affordable.

Secondly, there was consensus that strong lab and surveillance systems, and capacity to comply with the requirements of the International Health Regulations in all countries, should be considered as an essential element of health systems strengthening. The scope and complexity of the epidemic would have been much more manageable if more effective surveillance and health information systems were in place.

And lastly, to achieve this, we must ensure national ownership, local action and full support of development partners.¹

Thus the issues brought out during the present ebola virus disease outbreak have important implications for other countries and may provide vital inputs for investigation and response to outbreaks of infectious diseases in the future continues...

REFERENCES

1. Health systems strengthening in Ebola-affected countries. available @http://www.who.int/entity/mediacentre/commentaries/health-systems-ebola/en/ accessed on 29/12/14


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