



Ebola, the fear and tensions that came with It

Ebola is a river in the DR Congo. However this is a name that is being shared by a deadly viral disease. The Ebola virus once acquired chances for you to survive are minimal. The natural reservoir of the Ebola is believed to be with in the rain forest of Africa and Asia but has not yet been identified. As of now there is no specific treatment or vaccine for the haemorrhagic fever. Severe cases require intensive supportive care, as patients are frequently dehydrated and in need of intravenous fluids.

Its spread through direct physical contacts with body fluids like blood, saliva, stool, vomit, urine and sweat of an Ebola victim. Also it can be spread through eating game meat carrying the virus. This also can be spread if the host animal comes into contact with humans.

The pearl of Africa, Uganda has witnessed two major Ebola out breaks, an outbreak that occurred in October 2000 in the northern district of Gulu infecting 425 people and 244 died between September 2000 and January 2001 according to WHO. In this particular outbreak the disease claimed the life of Dr. Mathew Lukwiya the former Medical Superintendent of Lacor Hospital. Secondly, the most recent outbreak in western parts of Uganda is believed to be a different strain of the Ebola Virus. For this particular outbreak initial reports from the Bundibugyo area were given by villagers as a mysterious Disease. At this epicenter (Bundibugyo) a good number of families living in the mountains feed on monkey meat and putting their lives at risk. It's believed that the first Ebola victim must have eaten game meat. This mysterious Disease as initially reported in turn led to several health officials attending to patients with out proper protective gear, could be because of the poor working conditions and negligence by government. According to the Minister of Health Dr Emmanuel Otaala statement to Parliament , he reported that there were reports of a mysterious disease outbreak in Bundibugyo by August 20, 2007. In the four months up to CHOGM, the government did not care to inform Ugandans of the threat facing the country. CHOGM was to arrive by November 23, 2007. By December 3, a week after CHOGM, 84 cases had been reported. One wonders whether the timing was merely coincidental or deliberate. For those of you who are not familiar with Uganda, today Uganda has some of the World's best trained professionals and medical technicians who know to think and deliver health care. Lives were lost because of lack basic medical equipment, like gloves, masks and gowns. Where as other health officials were running away from the affected districts brave health workers search as Dr. Stephen Ssesanga stood there ground in the face of sure death not because they were reckless but because fleeing could not help either. Those who lost their lives in the lines of duty shall be remembered as heroes but somehow, how many patients will not be attended to due to their deaths with the ratio of Doctor to patient being 1:18700 and nurse to patient 1:3065.

An Ebola public Alert initiative by one of the media houses plus other electronic media caused more scare and tension as several people had to flee western districts, neighboring countries had to close their borders and screen every one coming from Uganda. The public was advised to avoid public gatherings, avoid contact with infected persons or body fluids of an Ebola victim and avoid contacts with Ebola corpse, avoid eating at funerals and that the funerals should take a short time.

University games had to be postponed as a result of the scare of Ebola; it was after Sam Zaramba Okayed and made a statement about not having a health risk in holding the games that games were continued. A friend stressed to me personally to stop shaking hands due to the Ebola scare and in fact few days ago I reminded her that I had been shaking hands and was still alive.

How ever on 4th January 2008 the Director General of Health Services, Dr Sam Zaramba issued a statement saying that the cumulative total of Ebola patients stands at 149 with 37 deaths, the positives were that 441 out of 771 contacts have completed 21 days of follow-up and are considered safe.

With Ebola now contained it has somehow spotlighted the sorry state of Uganda's Health sector. A lot needs to be done Private investment is needed with in the health sector to cater for the low income earners who are the masses. The masses suffer more than the dignitaries and their family who can easily be flown to Germany, USA



and Australia for treatment on taxi payer's money yet basic equipment and drugs are not available in the referral hospitals.

(Text: Kigozi Michael)