

Two US nurses are declared cured of Ebola

October 24 2014, by Kerry Sheridan

Two American nurses were declared cured of Ebola on Friday, and one was healthy enough to leave the hospital and meet President Barack Obama for a hug.

The good news for the nurses, who contracted Ebola while caring for a Liberian patient in Texas, came as the city of New York was dealing with its first case of the deadly virus.

Nina Pham smiled often and appeared healthy, wearing a turquoise shirt and dark business suit, as she addressed reporters outside the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

"I feel fortunate and blessed to be standing here today," Pham said.

"I am on my way back to recovery even as I reflect on how many others have not been so fortunate."

Later, Pham met Obama at the White House, where the president hugged her in the Oval Office as photographers snapped pictures.

Asked in a separate briefing with reporters if there was any concern about the US president coming so close to the nurse, White House spokesman Josh Earnest answered: "He was not at all concerned about any risk that would be associated with him showing his gratitude to her."

Pham was the first US health care worker to be infected with Ebola while working inside the United States, catching the disease from

Liberian patient Thomas Eric Duncan, who was admitted to Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas on September 28.

Her colleague, nurse Amber Vinson, also came down with Ebola. She, too, is clear of the virus but has not yet been released from Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia.

"Tests no longer detect virus in her blood," the hospital said, adding that she was "making good progress," but would stay in the serious communicable diseases unit for continued supportive care until further notice.

Pham, 26, said her thoughts are with her friend, Vinson, and another American doctor, Craig Spencer, who was diagnosed with Ebola in New York on Thursday after returning from Guinea.

She also thanked doctor Kent Brantly, an American missionary who was sickened with Ebola in Liberia over the summer and who donated his plasma to help her recovery.

Liberian patient

Pham's Ebola diagnosis was announced October 12, followed by Vinson's October 15.

Pham was initially hospitalized in Dallas at the hospital where she worked, but was transferred to the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center for treatment on October 16.

Both had extensive contact with Duncan, who traveled from his native Liberia to Texas to visit family last month before he fell ill and died of Ebola on October 8.

Pham and Vinson worked in the intensive care unit, though it remains unknown exactly how they were infected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said a "breach of protocol" was to blame, and has since issued stricter guidelines for donning protective gear when caring for Ebola patients.

Ebola is spread through close contact with the sweat, vomit, blood or other bodily fluids of an infected person.

Health care workers are at particular risk of contracting Ebola.

On Thursday, Spencer—the doctor in New York—was found to be infected with Ebola after treating patients in West Africa for the charity Doctors Without Borders.

A total of nine people with Ebola have been cared for in the United States, and all have survived except Duncan.

More than 4,800 people have died of Ebola so far this year, mainly in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, according to the World Health Organization.

There is no drug on the market to treat Ebola, and no approved vaccine to prevent the often-deadly virus that first emerged in 1976.

The WHO said that Ebola vaccine trials could start in West Africa in December, with hundreds of thousands of doses potentially being rolled out by mid-2015.

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