

Spanish medics blame budget cuts for Ebola infection

October 10 2014, by Roland Lloyd Parry, Elodie Cuzin

Doctors and nurses blame the shock Ebola infection in Madrid on Spanish government cuts that closed a top disease isolation unit.

The government has denied claims that staff at the Carlos III hospital where the infected woman worked were undertrained and ill-protected for treating patients with the deadly disease.

But healthcare workers complain that the hospital's sixth-floor isolation ward was shut down last year—only to be urgently reopened this summer to treat two missionaries repatriated from west Africa after catching the virus.

"The fundamental reason was the spending cuts," Doctor Marciano Sanchez, president of the Federation of Associations for the Defence of Public Healthcare, told AFP.

A 44-year-old nurse, Teresa Romero, caught the disease from the second missionary. She is the first person known to have been infected with Ebola outside of Africa.

Spain's painful austerity drive has taken a toll on its healthcare system, with Carlos III cutting its medical staff by 12 percent last year, according to figures published by the regional health ministry.

The cuts were made by the ruling conservative Popular Party to stabilise public finances to try to pull Spain out of economic crisis.

Toni Canto, a lawmaker for the left-wing UPyD party, claimed that the hospital "a place that is so important for treating this kind of problem, has been dismantled... due to healthcare policies of the (Popular Party in the Madrid region."

Spain's overall national health spending declined from 70 billion euros (\$88 billion) in 2009 to about 53 billion euros this year, according to government figures.

'Inadequate training'

Romero's colleagues have protested angrily, complaining of a lack of training in how to put on and take off the special outfits that were supposed to protect staff who came into contact with infected patients.

"The fact that there were not adequately qualified personnel and sufficient equipment is due to the cuts," Sanchez said.

"Everything is linked. It's hard to tell where the political incompetence ends and the cuts begin."

Spanish healthcare staff have complained of being overstretched for the past three years as cuts have begun to bite.

"In [primary care](#) the cuts affect the personnel above all," said Paulino Cubero, 51, a family doctor at the General Ricardos Health Centre, a family clinic in the working class Carabanchel district of southern Madrid.

"Replacements are not hired so when one member of staff is off, that day's patients have to be shared out among the others. You can't provide the same care to 40 patients as you can to 20."

Thirty doctors work at the centre, where some 50,000 patients are registered.

'Cuts handled badly'

"The cuts to healthcare have been handled very badly," Cubero said. "They should be identifying where there are inefficiencies in order to identify excess spending, not cut from where resources are needed."

On the whole, Spaniards love their health service. Many members of the public have flocked to defend it in a series of "white tides"—mass demonstrations led by medics in their white coats.

According to the government's last annual survey, more than 87 percent of patients who visited primary care centres and hospitals rated them as good.

"We really notice the impact of the cuts," said one local woman at the General Ricardos health centre, Alicia Fernandez, 58.

She said she waited seven months for a hip replacement last year.

"I was really unwell. It isn't fair because you pay your social security contributions your whole life, then when you need it, it's not there."

© 2014 AFP

Citation: Spanish medics blame budget cuts for Ebola infection (2014, October 10) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-spanish-medics-blame-ebola-infection.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.