

Red Cross officials: Ebola flaring anew in Africa

November 17 2014, by John-Thor Dahlburg

Red Cross officials helping to lead the fight against Ebola in West Africa said Monday the virus is still spreading, and they're having trouble recruiting health care workers to combat it.

Antoine Petitbon of the French Red Cross said that it's easier for him to recruit people to go to Iraq, despite the security hazards there. He said the French Red Cross is facing an unprecedented problem: Sixty percent of people it signs up to work in the Ebola zone subsequently back out due to pressure from families and friends.

Birte Hald, head of emergency operations for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said that after a recent surge of optimism that the virus was coming under control, especially in Liberia, it "is flaring up in new villages, in new locations." On Monday, Hald said, a team of international experts was being set to Mali to assist that nation's health authorities in stemming an outbreak of Ebola there.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't look as if we have bent the curve yet," said Hald, who heads the Red Cross federation's anti-Ebola effort in Africa. "It is absolutely premature to start being optimistic."

Ebola has killed more than 5,000 people in West Africa, mostly in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. On Monday, a surgeon who contracted Ebola in his native Sierra Leone died in a Nebraska hospital while being treated in a biocontainment unit, the hospital announced.

Red Cross officials, speaking at a joint news conference in Brussels, called on the media to get out the message that Ebola is not highly contagious. The better the public understands that, said Alasan Senghore, the federation's Africa director, "the more we will get people to volunteer to come and work in those countries."

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