

11th Sierra Leonean doctor dies from Ebola

December 18 2014, by Clarence Roy-Macaulay



In this Thursday, Oct. 16, 2014 file photo, a healthcare worker dons protective gear before entering an Ebola treatment center in the west of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Dr. Brima Kargbo, Sierra Leone's chief medical officer, confirmed Thursday Dec. 18, 2014, that Dr. Victor Willoughby died earlier in the day after being tested positive for Ebola on Saturday, the 11th doctor in the country to die from the disease that is ravaging West Africa. (AP Photo/Michael Duff, FILE)

One of Sierra Leone's most senior physicians died Thursday from Ebola, the 11th doctor in the country to succumb to the disease, a health official said.

Ebola has killed more than 350 health workers in West Africa, depleting the ranks of doctors and nurses in countries that already had too few to begin with. Because Ebola is spread through bodily fluids, it is only transmitted through close contact. It is often called the "caregivers' disease" because those infected are typically family members caring for the sick or health workers treating them.

Dr. Victor Willoughby tested positive for Ebola on Saturday and was being treated at a clinic near the capital run by the medical charity Emergency, said Dr. Brima Kargbo, the country's chief medical officer.

"Dr. Victor Willoughby was a mentor to us physicians and a big loss to the medical profession," said Kargbo. "He has always been available to help junior colleagues."

The 67-year-old died Thursday morning, just hours after an experimental drug arrived in the country for him. The arrival of ZMAb, developed in Canada, had raised hopes for Willoughby's survival. But he died before a dose could be administered, said Kargbo. ZMAb is related to ZMapp, another experimental drug that has been used to treat some Ebola patients. The drugs' efficacy in treating Ebola has not yet been proven.

Ebola has sickened more than 18,600 people, the vast majority in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Of those, more than 6,900 have died. The disease is now spreading fastest in Sierra Leone, but the World Health Organization says there are signs the infection rate may be stabilizing there. The infection rate in Liberia has been declining, while it is fluctuating in Guinea.

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