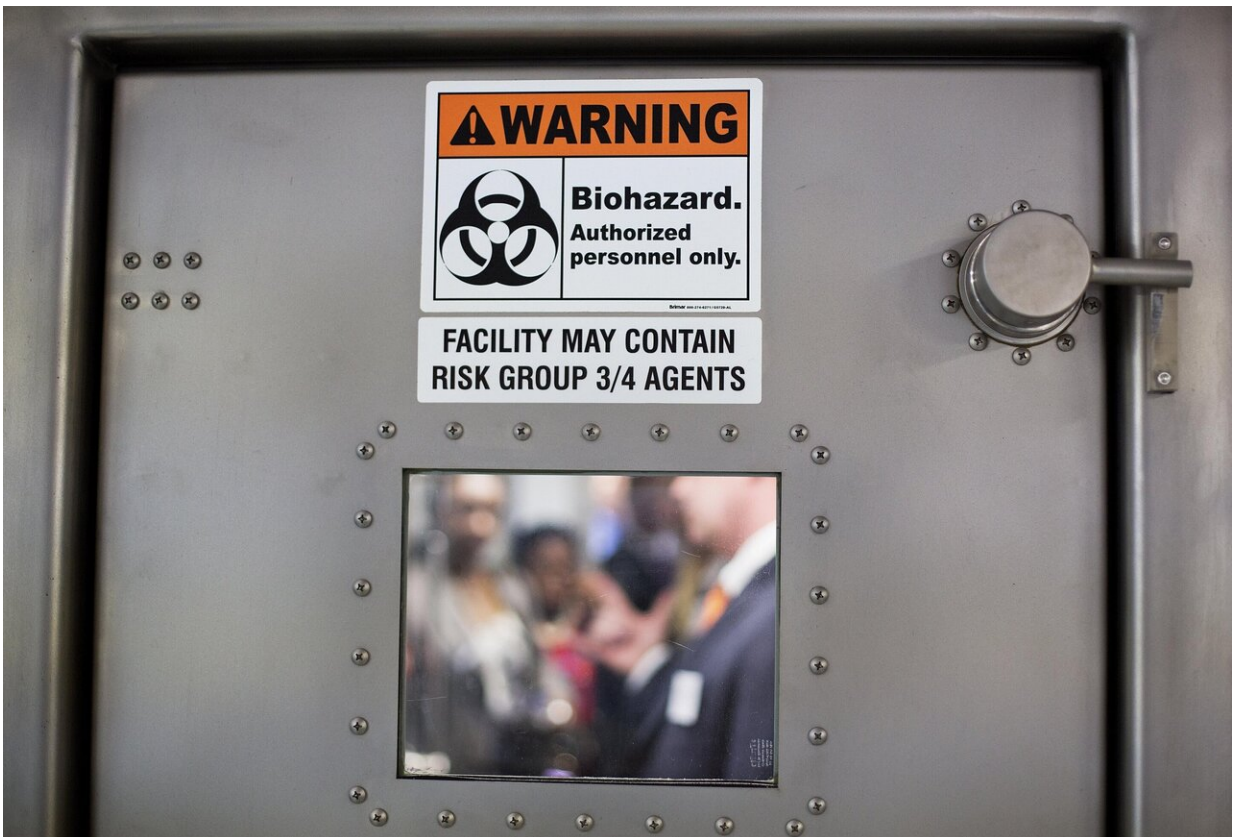


Former Ebola patients to mark 5 years since treatment in US

August 2 2019



In this Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2015 file photo, a warning sign is posted to the door of a medevac biocontainment unit aboard a military transport plane at Dobbins Air Force Reserve Base during a media tour, in Marietta, Ga. Some of the first Ebola virus patients to be successfully treated in the United States are reuniting five years later with the medical team that treated them at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta. (AP Photo/David Goldman, File)

As the second deadliest Ebola outbreak in history rages in Congo, a doctor who survived the deadly disease five years ago worries that people aren't paying enough attention.

"It's happening in Democratic Republic of Congo and most of the Western World is not paying much attention to it," Dr. Kent Brantly told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Brantly, a missionary and doctor who was infected with the virus in 2014 while caring for patients in Liberia, was the first Ebola patient brought to the United States for treatment at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta.

Brantly's arrival on Aug. 2, 2014, received intense news coverage, with cameras capturing him walking from an ambulance into the hospital in a white protective suit. In a recent interview with The Associated Press, he recalled talking to his wife right after that.

"She said 'Kent, we watched you walk into the hospital,'" he said. "I said, you were watching me? And she said, 'Oh, Kent, the whole world was watching you.' I had no clue. No idea that people were paying attention."

Brantly, who worked for the North Carolina-based aid organization Samaritan's Purse, also remembered the moment in Africa when he received the bleak diagnosis.



In this Sunday, July 14, 2019 photo, Red Cross workers carry the remains of 16-month-old Muhindo Kakinire from the morgue into a truck as health workers disinfect the area in Beni, Congo. The World Health Organization has declared the Ebola outbreak an international emergency. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

"We had had around 20 patients with Ebola in our treatment unit and we only had one survivor," he said. "So when my friend Nancy Writebol and I were both diagnosed with Ebola, I thought the chances of both of us surviving were nearly zero."

Writebol, a missionary who was the second Ebola patient brought to Emory, worked alongside Brantly at the Elwa Mission Hospital near the Liberian capital of Monrovia. She recalled a knot forming in her stomach when she and Brantly were diagnosed.

"By the time I was evacuated out, I was probably at my lowest," Writebol recently told the AP. "I think at times they wondered if I'd even survive the flight."

Emory entered uncharted territory when Brantly and Writebol arrived within days of each other, said Dr. Colleen Kraft, one of the lead doctors on the team that treated them.



In this Saturday, July 20, 2019 photo, a health worker in protective clothing burns the college entry exam papers completed by Ebola patient Claude Mabowa Sasi, 21, after they were photographed for scoring in Beni, Congo. "I have not lost everything, and I am confident that I will succeed and honor my mother's memory," Mabowa said. "If she were still here, I think she'd be proud of me." (AP Photo/Al-Hadji Kudra Maliro)

"It was like walking on the moon a little bit because no one had ever cared for Ebola, so we didn't know what to expect," she told the AP.

But the Emory team had been preparing their unit for controlling serious communicable diseases for 10 years and was ready for the challenge.

Dr. Ian Crozier arrived about a month later, on Sept. 9, 2014, after contracting the disease in Sierra Leone. The fourth Amber Vinson, one of two nurses who became infected in Dallas while treating the first patient to be diagnosed with Ebola in the United States. She arrived at Emory on Oct. 15, 2014.

On Friday, the fifth anniversary of Brantly's arrival at Emory, he and Writebol planned to reunite in Atlanta with the medical team that treated them. Crozier had planned to join them as well but ended up having to remain in Congo, where Ebola is spreading .



In this Wednesday, July 17, 2019 photo, 2-month-old Lahya Kathembo is carried by a nurse waiting for test results at an Ebola treatment center in Beni, Congo. Lahya became an orphan in a day. Her mother succumbed to Ebola on a Saturday morning. By sunset her father was dead. Her tests came back negative for Ebola. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

The 2014-16 outbreak, the deadliest on record, killed more than 11,300 people before West Africa was declared Ebola-free in 2016.

The current outbreak in Congo has killed more than 1,800 people, nearly a third of them children. It has already become the second-deadliest outbreak in history even though a highly effective experimental vaccine is now available.

Brantly and Writebol also both returned to Africa after their recovery, and Writebol continues to work with Ebola survivors. The two hope their stories can bring attention to the current crisis.

Writebol said "it was amazing to us, having experienced Ebola ourselves, how the walls came down between us and Liberians."



This Saturday, July 13, 2019 shows an Ebola treatment center set up next to the hospital in Beni, Congo. Nearly one year into the epidemic which has killed more than 1,700 in eastern Congo, a rise in community deaths is fueling a resurgence of Ebola in Beni. During a two-week period in July alone there were 30 people who died at home in the town. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



A view of the Poids Lourd checkpoint on the border between Congo and Rwanda, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2019. Congo's presidency says the border is open again with Rwanda hours after its eastern neighbor closed it over the deadly Ebola outbreak. Congo had protested the closure, which went against international health recommendations. The closure occurred Thursday morning as the first case of direct transmission of the Ebola virus was confirmed in Goma, the Congo city of more than 2 million people on the Rwandan border. (AP Photo)



People wash their hands at the Congo side of the Poids Lourds checkpoint at the border between Congo and Rwanda, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2019. Congo's presidency says the border is open again with Rwanda hours after its eastern neighbor closed it over the deadly Ebola outbreak. The closure occurred Thursday morning as the first case of direct transmission of the Ebola virus was confirmed in Goma, the Congo city of more than 2 million people on the Rwandan border.(AP Photo)

© 2019 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Former Ebola patients to mark 5 years since treatment in US (2019, August 2) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-ebola-patients-years-treatment.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.