

Two American Ebola patients leave hospital (Update)

August 21 2014, by Kerry Sheridan

Two American missionaries who were sickened with Ebola while working in Liberia and were treated with an experimental drug are doing better and have left the hospital, doctors said Thursday.

Doctor Kent Brantly, 33, and Nancy Writebol, 60, both Christian aid workers, were infected with Ebola in Monrovia last month as the largest outbreak in history swept West Africa.

They were airlifted to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia for treatment in special isolation units three weeks ago.

Both also received a drug called ZMapp, though experts say it is impossible to know if that aided their recovery.

"The discharge from the hospital of both these patients poses no public health threat," said Bruce Ribner, director of Emory's Infectious Disease Unit.

"This is a fairly devastating disease, but we would anticipate that in general most patients, if they have not had any substantial organ damage, will make a complete recovery."

Brantly, who smiled and held hands with his wife before reading a prepared statement for reporters, looked thin but otherwise healthy.

"I am thrilled to be alive, to be well and to be reunited with my family,"

Brantly said.

Writebol was released on August 19, and did not appear at the press conference.

Her release was not announced earlier this week because she had requested privacy and did not want details of her medical condition to be made public, doctors said.

"Nancy is free of the virus, but the lingering effects of the battle have left her in a significantly weakened condition," her husband, David, said in a statement issued by SIM USA, the Christian aid group for which Writebol worked.

"Thus, we decided it would be best to leave the hospital privately to be able to give her the rest and recuperation she needs at this time."

No drug, no cure

The current outbreak of Ebola virus has killed 1,350 people and sickened more than 2,400 since March in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

There is no drug or vaccine for Ebola, which can cause fever, vomiting, diarrhea, organ failure and hemorrhage.

It is transmitted by close contact with bodily fluids, putting healthcare workers, loved ones and those who kiss or touch bodies during funeral rites at particular risk.

The World Health Organization said two more doctors and one nurse in Liberia have now received ZMapp, which is made in tobacco leaves and contains a cocktail of antibodies.

"The nurse and one of the doctors show a marked improvement. The condition of the second doctor is serious but has improved somewhat," said a WHO statement.

However, the drug is in short supply and doctors have stressed that without rigorous clinical trials they cannot tell if it helped the patients recover or not.

Time away

Brantly said he had no inkling that he would be dealing with Ebola when he first went to Liberia in October with his family.

"We didn't receive our first Ebola patient until June, but when she arrived, we were ready. During the course of June and July, the number of Ebola patients increased steadily," he said.

Brantly fell ill on July 23, and his diagnosis with Ebola was confirmed on July 26, he said.

He said he now plans to retreat from the public eye to spend some time with his family.

"I am forever thankful to God for sparing my life and am glad for any attention my sickness has attracted to the plight of West Africa in the midst of this epidemic," Brantly said.

"Please continue to pray for Liberia and the people of West Africa, and encourage those in positions of leadership and influence to do everything possible to bring this Ebola outbreak to an end."

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