

Anguish and fear at Spain hospital where Ebola spread

October 7 2014, by Michaela Cancela-Kieffer

At Madrid's La Paz-Carlos III hospital, where a Spanish nurse became the first person to contract Ebola outside of Africa, anxious staff gathered in small groups on Tuesday to discuss their anger and dismay over the case.

"It's all the hospital talks about. But we don't know anything, there is a lot of nervousness, disinformation," an [emergency room doctor](#) told AFP.

The nurse, who has not been named, was part of a medical team of about 30 at the hospital that treated two elderly Spanish missionaries who died of Ebola shortly after they were repatriated from Africa.

She was diagnosed as having the disease on Monday.

Health officials said they were trying to find out who she came into contact with, and were monitoring 30 people—including co-workers and the nurse's husband—for symptoms of Ebola.

"People are freaked out," said a cardiologist at the hospital, which had been specially prepared to treat the disease and which had put in place strict rules limiting access to the infected missionaries.

"We cannot understand how someone who was wearing a double protection suit and two pairs of gloves could have been contaminated."

She claimed Spain was not adequately equipped to deal with the hemorrhagic fever and questioned the decision to repatriate the missionaries, mirroring a widely held view among Spanish healthcare workers.

The hospital had prepared an entire floor to treat the two men in isolation and supposedly followed international protocols for handling highly infectious diseases.

Miguel Pajares, 75, who was infected with Ebola in Liberia, died on August 12, while Manuel Garcia Viejo, 69, who was repatriated from Sierra Leone, died on September 25.

The infected nurse is believed to have contracted the virus while caring for Garcia Viejo. Officials said she visited his room twice, once to clean him and then to collect material after his death.

She went off on leave the day after his death, although she stayed in Madrid, and began to feel ill on September 30.

But she only went to hospital in Alcorcon, a southern Madrid suburb where she lives, on Sunday—five days later—complaining of a fever.

More cases possible

Health officials said they could not rule out that some of the people who were in contact with the nurse could develop Ebola but they stressed the risk was low.

"It would be very innocent to think that there is no possibility of contagion, of course it exists, it is low but it exists," the health ministry's chief coordinator for health alerts and emergencies, Fernando Simon, told Cadena Ser radio.

"There is a person with Ebola who was in contact with other people, in some cases close contact, such as with her husband. So yes there is the possibility that one of her contacts is infected. We have to work with this hypothesis."

Spain's health ministry says the team which treated the two missionaries received special training—but one of the infected nurse's colleagues at the hospital disagreed.

"The only protocol that we had was a course that lasted 15 minutes to learn how to put on and remove the protective overalls," she said.

The infected nurse was moved from the hospital in Alcorcon to La Paz-Carlos III overnight where she is being treated in isolation.

Health officials said her health was evolving "favourably".

A group of ambulance drivers gathered outside the hospital expressed concern over the conditions in which any new Ebola patients will be transported.

"We are the ones who have to transport patients from hospital to [hospital](#) but they are not telling us anything," one of the drivers said.

The latest Ebola outbreak has killed 3,439 people across five west African nations—Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Senegal.

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