The Ebola outbreak – what lessons for global health

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Expertise

• District Medical Officer Burkina Faso 1988-1993
• Since then worked as epidemiologist specialising on Ebola, Marburg, Lassa for Institutes of Tropical Medicine in Heidelberg, Antwerp, London and Berlin
• 1999: Marburg HF DRC, outbreak investigation & response
• 2000: Ebola HF Uganda, outbreak investigation & response
• 2005: Marburg HF Angola, evaluation of Médecins Sans Frontières intervention
• 2014: Ebola HF Guinea, investigation of people’s resistance against control measures
• 2015: Ebola HF Liberia, advisor to International Rescue Committee on implementing Ebola Treatment Centre
Lesson from Ebola outbreak

We ought to respond to Ebola outbreaks adequately and timely

We should not rely on Ebola outbreaks to be “self-limiting”
More of the same, please (but not too little, too late)

Established response activities, if implemented timely in sufficient intensity and quality, will prevent the next Ebola outbreak from becoming a national or international emergency.

These are:

• Case finding, isolation and treatment
• Contact tracing and follow-up
• Barrier nursing
• Safe and dignified burials
• Public mobilisation

The only innovative response activity that may revolutionise the Ebola response is (ring) vaccination.
How has the limited public health expenditure impacted on outbreak control?

- Low geographic coverage of health facilities, low number of health staff in rural areas, low perceived quality of care
- Weak capacity for outbreak investigation and control

- Have funds for post-war reconstruction been used in the best possible way? Lessons to be learned here?
Which drivers of outbreak beyond lack of outbreak control capacity and lack of trust between health services and population?

• Population’s lack of trust included central government and local/traditional authorities

• Text messages etc. played crucial role in spreading destructive rumours

• Epicentre in border triangle with artificial borders and official language barriers

• Highly mobile population, taking advantage of recently reconstructed road network

• Delayed and – for a long time – inadequate national and international response
Outbreak not going into million cases and not spreading massively into neighbouring countries – a success of international aid?

• Prediction of mega-outbreak unlikely scenario
• Containment success indeed, but joint effort of international and national efforts
• Non-spread to neighbouring countries to some degree good luck
Which other countries at risk of Ebola and other outbreaks?

• Ebola outbreak: countries with suitable ecology, particularly problematic if health system weak
  – in addition to the known ones e.g. Guinea Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Central African Republic

• Ebola importation: worldwide

• Other outbreaks: worldwide
What could global community and countries learn from outbreak?

• Act
  – Faster and more pro-actively
  – More flexibly to changing epidemiology
  – More humanely and culturally sensitive

• Prepare
  – Investigation and response
  – Research
How should the lessons learnt from this outbreak be considered in EU global health policy and management of EU aid

• Strengthen health systems in vulnerable countries
• ? Support good governance ?
• Increase rapid investigation and response activity, e.g. by complementing GOARN through a reserve of competent and available individuals
• Fund researchers to prepare research protocols even if unclear whether and when implemented
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Guinea

Qu’est ce qu’il faut faire pour éviter la maladie?

1. Ne mangeons pas d’animaux de brousse comme la chauve souris, le singe, les rongeurs qui sont des réservoirs de virus.

2. Ne touchons pas les corps, le sang, les urines, les selles, les vomissures, la salive, la sueur, les habits et tout objet utilisé par le malade.

3. Évitons de procéder aux pratiques traditionnelles favorisant la transmission de la maladie: les rituels funéraires, les repas collectifs avec ou sans lavage des mains au savon, l’exposition, la conservation et le transport des corps des personnes mortes d’Ebola.

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