

November 6, 2014 CDC Ebola Response Update

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Erin Sykes] Bringing West Africa's Ebola epidemic under control means breaking the chain of transmission by quickly getting Ebola patients into treatment and isolation. Community care centers will be part of the solution.

CDC's Neil Vora has just returned from Liberia, where he helped local health authorities establish a model community care center in remote Bomi County.

Dr. Vora, tell us about the problem community care centers might help solve.

[Dr. Neil Vora] Unfortunately, what we're witnessing in West Africa is an unprecedented outbreak of Ebola, and Liberia is one of the countries that are most heavily affected. One of the strategies that has been proposed to combat the ongoing epidemic is to build Ebola Treatment Units, but unfortunately, in Liberia, there currently are not enough functioning Ebola Treatment Units. And an alternative, interim solution that has been proposed is to use community care centers. So community care centers are basically smaller units that have been established specifically in the context of this Ebola outbreak with two goals. The first goal is that these community care centers provide an opportunity for patients with Ebola to get medical care, giving them a chance to survive. And the other rationale behind these community care centers is that by bringing patients out of the community and into the community care center, you actually break chains of transmission within the community. But one of the challenges that these community care centers face is that not every patient who comes to the center actually has Ebola, because a variety of other illnesses, such as malaria, can actually look like Ebola. And so, when patients are first brought to the community care center, they're put in a different part of the community care center, depending on the symptoms that they have which would make them more or less likely to transmit Ebola virus if they really did end up having Ebola.

[Erin Sykes] What did you see when you were in Liberia?

[Dr. Neil Vora] The time I spent in Liberia was both memorable, but at the same time often very challenging. One of the stories that comes to mind immediately is about a young doctor that I had the opportunity to talk with. This is a doctor who was completing his medical internship when this outbreak struck in Liberia. So he had to leave his internship so that he could work in an Ebola Treatment Unit, but in the course of working in that Treatment Unit, he ended up developing Ebola himself. He was eventually brought to the Bomi Community Care Center for additional medical therapies and I had the opportunity to talk to him while he was in the Bomi Community Care Center. And I felt a special bond with him because I have also recently completed my own medical training, and so I could understand some of the challenges that he was going through. But when I first met him, he was actually feeling pretty positive about the situation and was very hopeful about the outcomes, but over the next several days, his situation, unfortunately, rapidly deteriorated and he ended up dying, which for me was very difficult news to hear.

Another instance was that there was a mother and an eight month-old baby in a nearby area who both were suspected to have Ebola. And so, the mother and her baby had to be brought over to the Bomi Community Care Center, but unfortunately, the area they were coming from did not have any ambulances so they were put in the back of a pick-up truck and a piece of plastic tarp was thrown over the back of this pick-up truck and they were driven over three to four hours over some of the worst roads you can imagine. These are not even paved roads; these are just mud roads. And I can't even wrap my head around how difficult that must be, first of all to just sit in the back of a pick-up truck through a ride like that, but to do that with an eight month-old baby while both of them have Ebola is really difficult to hear about and to imagine. And to make things worse, unfortunately, several days later, the eight month-old baby ended up dying. Fortunately, the mother actually ended up surviving. And I think that's one of the important things to realize here is that, if patients are brought into care soon enough, it gives them an opportunity to survive. And one of the really positive and hopeful outcomes of this Bomi Community Care Center is that they are actually training survivors of Ebola to work in the Bomi Community Care Center and this really spreads that message of hope that there *is* a possibility of surviving and it gives these people a way to integrate themselves back into society. So, despite some of the really challenging and terrible news that you sometimes hear, there are also positive stories coming out of this and this outbreak will eventually come to an end.

Thank you, Dr. Vora. Helping Ebola-affected countries establish community care centers is just one part of what CDC is doing to keep America safe by containing the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.