



Ebola viral disease outbreak in West Africa Health Workers in the frontline: They need our support

To date 416 health workers have been infected with Ebola. 233 health workers have already died. Nearly half (118) were members of PSI affiliated trade unions in West-Africa. Health care workers are the unsung heroes of this crisis.

By 8 October 2014, the outbreak of EVD had already caused the death of over 4,000 people and more than twice that number may be ill (more than 8,300 persons) according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

It is alarming that of all the cases, 416 are healthcare workers known to have been infected with EVD in caring for patients, and that of all the deaths, 233 were healthcare workers who died due to EVD. One in ten of all deaths confirmed due to Ebola are healthcare workers.

Public Services International, the global Federation representing health care workers has surveyed the health and social service affiliates in the most affected countries and in Nigeria to determine their greatest needs in addressing the outbreak. The common response was that knowledge and information needs were largely met, but that in most settings, the members of our health affiliates had no access to even basic protective equipment, and their exposure to EVD was great. Together the affiliates in the most affected countries reported the deaths of 118 healthcare workers who had died of Ebola in the line of duty. This means that over half of the healthcare workers who have died were our own PSI members.

The healthcare workers are dying in countries highly affected by the outbreak – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. But healthcare workers are becoming infected outside these countries, in the course of their caregiving duties – first in Nigeria, and now in Spain and in the United States.

This situation is deplorable, and brings to light gross deficiencies, the short-sightedness of underinvestment in health services and the deeply misguided understaffing of health care workers. The EVD outbreak shows up clearly the threat posed to societies when quality public health systems are absent. Moreover, the widespread failure to equip healthcare workers and to give them the means to protect themselves and save their lives is appalling and intolerable.

EPSU, Europe's federation representing health care workers supports the appeal of PSI for contributions to an aid fund to assist the families of workers who have died and who have no social protection benefits: [PSI Aid Fund](#).

PSI has advanced a strategy both to improve the health and safety of healthcare workers in the EVD outbreak as immediately as possible, and to ensure involvement of trade unions of healthcare workers in policy, planning and procedures first to contain the outbreak and then to improve and expand public sector health systems in the affected countries. Funds are being mobilised and EPSU and PSI affiliates are invited to review the strategy and to contribute resources in solidarity.

The Standing Committee meeting at its 41st session in Brussels on 9 October 2014, took note of the consequences to date of the Ebola viral disease (EVD) outbreak for the affiliates of PSI and of EPSU in the health and social services and of the [PSI Statement “Healthcare workers killed by Ebola’s worst outbreak ever”](#), assessed the impact of the outbreak and exchanged views on action to address the alarming situation and to support PSI’ Ebola Virus Disease Trade Union Intervention Strategy 2014-2016.