PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
AUSTRALIAN HEALTHCARE AND HOSPITALS ASSOCIATION

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Ebola

113 Australian Health Professors call for more Government action

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has presented a letter signed by 113 Australian professors of health and supported by a number of others calling for further action on Ebola by the Australian government. The letter was presented to the office of the Prime Minister today.

The professors’ letter begins by acknowledging the $18million dollars already committed by Health Minister Peter Dutton and Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop. It then urges the Prime Minister “to bolster the Australian response to the international efforts to control the outbreak of Ebola virus affecting West Africa and other countries”.

According to the CEO of the PHAA, Adjunct Professor Michael Moore, “The best means of protecting Australia and other high-income countries is for robust control efforts at the source of the outbreak. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is a global health catastrophe which threatens future economic prosperity, regional political stability and human health globally. It is in our national interest to ensure the epidemic is contained”.

“One main concern is the epidemic has escalated exponentially since July 2014, and health systems in affected countries are collapsing as a result. Only about 10-20% of Ebola patients are receiving care in treatment centres, which means infection is uncontrolled in communities. It is estimated that at least 70% of patients need to be in treatment centres to control the epidemic. This requires skilled personnel who can build hospitals, deliver care, provide security and manage the required logistics,” said Mr Moore.

The letter goes on to argue “The outbreak has seen a strong political and financial commitment from countries, such as the United States of America, China, Cuba and the United Kingdom, including deployment of military troops. Some of these activities have included: building and staffing treatment units, creating supply chains, providing air bridges, and deploying teams to staff public health and clinical centres. The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations have called on countries with capacity to increase their response to the outbreak”.

There are serious risks to Australia and other high-income countries from this outbreak, particularly if it were to spread into other populous countries in the region. While it is unlikely that the virus would become established in a country such as Australia, it is still a threat to our health system. We can feel confident how Australian health authorities would manage a single case of Ebola virus infection, although our health system has never been tested for a disease like this.

The professors conclude by calling on the Prime Minister to do the following:

- provide appropriate troops and equipment,
- deploy our Australian Medical Assistance Team,
- assemble and support appropriately qualified health and other civilians who are ready and waiting to help
- make a significant financial contribution

For further information/comment:

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