

# Our Plan to Contain Ebola

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It's no coincidence that the first two people to contract the Ebola virus in the United States are nurses. All over the country, nurses and health professionals are the first responders to each and every health crisis. Ebola is no exception.

We know this firsthand. As the second-largest nurses union, the AFT's priority is keeping our communities safe and healthy. That is why we are taking action on all fronts—globally, nationally and at individual health facilities—to confront and contain Ebola. With the right training, planning and equipment, we can stop this vicious virus from spreading in the United States.

## AFT's priority is keeping our communities safe and healthy.

At University Hospital in Newark, N.J., nurses and health professionals are screening and treating patients who have arrived at the city's international airport with symptoms of the virus.

At St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, Mont., one of the nation's four hospitals designated to receive Ebola patients, nurses and health professionals are preparing for the possibility that Ebola patients will be sent to them.

At hospitals throughout our nation, nurses and health professionals are doing everything they can to be ready to care for whoever comes through their doors.

However, while the risk of Ebola exposure in the United States remains low, American health professionals and facilities lack the support, planning and equipment they need to fight a virus that leaps over geographic boundaries and takes advantage of the slightest oversight.

That is why, this week, our nurses and health-care leaders from around the country came together to address this potential crisis with a three-point plan that calls for the following:

- Infection-control protocols and worker-preparedness plans at all health facilities.
- Dedicated, specially trained teams of willing staff—including doctors, nurses, lab

and X-ray technicians, and housekeeping staff—to care for potential Ebola patients. And there must be adequate staffing.

- Inclusion of frontline providers in the development and implementation of plans.

And because communicating the real facts to the public is so important, the AFT has put resources on AFT.org to share what we know about the Ebola outbreak with health professionals and communities. There also are materials on how to keep our children safe at school.

This three-point plan is based on what our nurses and health professionals say they need to keep themselves, their patients and communities safe. We know what we need to do to be ready. However, as I've heard from many of our members, we aren't there yet.

One nurse in Connecticut said that he first learned about the training planned at his hospital by reading about it in the newspaper. That's a complete failure of communication. Frontline providers must be involved in every step of the planning process.

At the same time, our nation's public health infrastructure is frayed after years of nothing but cuts.

Funding for the federal Hospital Preparedness Program, which helps communities and hospitals prepare for public health emergencies, has decreased by 50 percent since 2003, according to the Congressional Research Service. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has lost nearly \$1 billion in funding due to sequestration and other cuts. And ironically, as politicians call for an Ebola czar, we don't even have a surgeon general because of partisan politics.

Policymakers must make a national commitment to rebuilding our public health infrastructure, which is responsible for ensuring that the public has the right information and that healthcare providers know how to confront and contain an outbreak of disease.

Two nurses in Dallas contracted the Ebola virus because they were doing the job millions of nurses and health professionals do every day—putting their patients first.

Confronted with confusion and changing protocols, something went wrong. Now, days and weeks later, the Dallas hospital and government officials have apologized for mistakes, after first blaming these very same nurses.

It's no surprise there's panic in the United States. While containable, Ebola is life-threatening if not contained, killing 70 percent of those diagnosed.

That's why we must not let what happened in Dallas happen again. And that's why our union is not simply calling out what went wrong, but proposing this three-point plan that can help proactively contain Ebola, treat acutely ill Ebola patients, and keep health-care providers and communities safe.

The bottom line of our plan: Government and public health leaders must ensure those on the frontlines are armed with the training, equipment and resources they need, and hospitals must put the safety of healthcare providers and care of patients above profits. We know the Ebola virus works fast. We have to work faster and smarter.

Our nation boasts the most advanced health-care system in the world. We have the capacity and know-how to address this public health issue. If we listen to the voices of our nurses and health professionals, we can keep our communities safe and healthy.



Weingarten and the AFT's nurses and healthcare leaders present a proposed plan to contain the Ebola virus.

Photo: Michael Campbell