

How World Health Organization has fared in tackling the 2014-2015 outbreak of *Ebola virus* disease?

Sir,

Since the notification of the first confirmed case of *Ebola virus* disease in March 2014, close to 27,550 cases and 11,235 *Ebola* associated deaths have been reported.^[1] Although the public health system of the *Ebola*-affected nations had many weaknesses, the World Health Organization (WHO) also failed to respond to the outbreak in initial stages, especially with regard to their functioning as an agency and even the implementation of International Health Regulations (IHR) as the disease was subsequently detected in the European and American region.^[1-3]

In fact, to assess the response of WHO's to *Ebola* disease, a panel comprising of scientific experts was created to identify the lacunae and suggest possible recommendation to improve the quality of response to any future outbreaks.^[4] The panel came out with their comments and recommendation in three main areas pertaining to WHO:

1. The IHR: It aims to ensure global health security by ensuring prevention and control and to develop an effective response to restrict the international spread of disease without disturbing the international traffic and trade. However, the critical analysis revealed that most of the member states failed to implement the surveillance and data collection measures, and even imposed travel bans and other unnecessary measures resulting in negative political/economic/social impact on the affected nations. The panel expert recommend that WHO should formulate a comprehensive plan to strengthen the core provisions of IHR in all nations; strengthen various levels of organization; plan to introduce incentives for nations who notify public health risks to WHO; and discourage nations from implementing measures that interfere with international traffic/trade.^[4,5]
2. Health emergency response capacity: The panel concluded that WHO should be the main response agency for all health emergencies. However, to ensure, it reforms are needed, especially with regard to the funding of agency to tackle a health

emergency, strengthening of the various offices pertaining to their resources, and development of a global health emergency workforce/contingency fund so that desired resources can be immediately deployed without wasting time.

3. Cooperation between health and humanitarian systems: In the current outbreak of *Ebola*, a wide gap was highlighted between systems for responding to health emergencies and systems for humanitarian response. Thus, the panel recommends integrating these two systems at the earliest.^[4,5]

Moreover, the estimates suggest that in the month of July 2014, there were fewer diagnostic services/medical teams/trained responders and no vaccine, but over the next 1 year, the WHO has mobilized its largest response to the most severe/complex outbreak of this disease in the last four decades.^[6,7] In fact, by July 2015, WHO has strengthened its response in different areas of the disease, namely technical experts; logistics and other support; early diagnosis; training; extending support to more than 110 nations; and expediting the vaccine trials so that vaccine can be introduced within 18 months.^[6-9] Thus, though our outbreak response has definitely improved, in this process in excess of 10,000 people, including health professionals have lost their lives.^[1,4,9]

To conclude, as the *Ebola* outbreak is still ongoing, it will be wrong on our part to only concentrate on the improved capacities in *Ebola*-affected nations. It is very important to realize that WHO has to seriously consider about their organization and functioning to minimize the sufferings among people on a global scale.

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