

Beat: Health

Texas hospital admits mistakes in handling 1st Ebola case

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USPA News - A Texas hospital has admitted that it made a number of mistakes in the initial treatment of a Liberian man who turned out to be infected with Ebola, but the hospital's chief executive said it remains under investigation how two of its nurses also became infected with the deadly virus. Barclay Berdan, the CEO of Texas Health Resources, said late Saturday that its hospital in Dallas had failed to effectively communicate to staff members that patient Thomas Eric Duncan had traveled from Liberia, which is one of the worst-hit countries of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa that has so far claimed more than 4,500 deaths.

"I know that, as an institution, we made mistakes in handling this very difficult challenge," Berdan said. "When we initially treated Mr. Duncan, we examined him thoroughly and performed numerous tests, but the fact that Mr. Duncan had traveled to Africa was not communicated effectively among the care team, though it was in his medical chart." Berdan added that staff at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas did not correctly diagnose Duncan's symptoms as those of Ebola during his first visit to the hospital's emergency department on September 26. "For this, we are deeply sorry," the chief executive officer said in a letter to be published in Dallas-area newspapers on Sunday. Berdan said Texas Health Resources - which operates a network of hospitals in Texas - had already begun Ebola preparedness activities when Duncan arrived in late September, but training and education programs had not yet been fully deployed. "In short, despite our best intentions and skilled medical teams, we did not live up to the high standards that are the heart of our hospital's history, mission and commitment," he said. But it remains unclear how and when two of the hospital's nurses were infected with the Ebola virus, or if the spread was the direct result of errors made by the hospital. Berdan, however, emphasized that the company believes its staff members have complied with Ebola guidelines from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Our focus is on the facts, and we are determined to get all of the answers as soon as we can. We have interviewed our staff and reviewed our records and are bringing in outside expertise to completely analyze what happened and how," he said. "Based on what we already know, I can tell you that many of the theories and allegations being presented in the media do not align with facts stated in the medical record and the accounts of caregivers who were present on the scene." Since Duncan arrived at the hospital, Texas Health Resources has implemented a number of measures to prevent similar mistakes in the future, which includes specialized training for personal protective equipment use and a so-called `buddy system` for staff members. "We have made changes in our system of electronic medical records to assist in the accurate diagnosis of any future Ebola case," Berdan added. Duncan, the first person to be diagnosed with Ebola outside of Africa, tested positive for the virus on September 30. He had left Liberia on September 19 and arrived in Dallas the next day after taking flights that took him to Brussels and the Washington, D.C. area. He fell ill four days later and sought medical care on September 26, only to be turned away before being hospitalized on September 28 after developing symptoms consistent with Ebola. Two nurses who treated Duncan later fell ill and tested positive for Ebola, with the CDC saying at least one of them may have been infected following a breach in infection control protocols. Both nurses - Nina Pham and Amber Vinson - are currently in a stable condition and undergoing treatment.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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