

EBOLA RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

November 2015

The 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa has been the largest in history, threatening not only *health* in the region but also economic growth, food security, and political stability. The outbreak has both exposed and exacerbated the weaknesses of health systems, leading to challenges in providing routine health services, including maternal, newborn, and child health services.

Health workers, especially those on the front lines of care, have been particularly affected. Support for local health workers and for building more resilient and sustainable workforces and health systems remains critical. [IntraHealth International](#), as a global champion of health workers, is at the forefront of advocating for the policies, plans, and investments needed for Ebola response and recovery. Through its leadership, IntraHealth has galvanized major nonprofit, private-sector, and civil society partners around the world to collectively advocate to the US government and other donor agencies for strategic emergency and long-term investments in health workers and health systems.

Through a [set of policy recommendations](#), the IntraHealth-led Frontline Health Workers Coalition spearheaded conversations with US officials on supporting the needs of local frontline health workers in West Africa and worldwide and produced a [commissioned analysis estimating the costs of scaling up the health workforce in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone](#). In December 2014, [IntraHealth president and CEO Pape Gaye testified as an expert witness during an Ebola-focused US Senate hearing](#). "As this Ebola outbreak has already started to fade from the consciousness of some, one of the crucial underlying conditions that helped the virus spread remains the lack of a sustainable and resilient global health workforce," Gaye said. In January and May 2015, IntraHealth delivered statements to the World Health Organization recommending it "help countries transition from independent emergency response units into sustainable capacity-building efforts fully integrated into ministries of health with close connections with other ministries."

mHero: MOBILE PHONE OUTREACH TO HEALTH WORKERS

At the height of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, IntraHealth collaborated with UNICEF and other partners to create mHero, a mobile phone-based communications system that connects ministries of health staff with frontline health workers via two-way SMS text messages. mHero combines three existing technologies—IntraHealth's [iHRIS](#) personnel management software, UNICEF's [RapidPro](#) SMS platform, and the University of Oslo's district health information software ([DHIS 2](#))—into a powerful communication tool facilitating rapid communication with frontline health workers. mHero was first used by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) in Liberia to connect with health workers to validate and update their information so the MOHSW could have a better understanding of where health workers were working during the outbreak.

In February of 2015, mHero was selected by USAID from among 1,500 applicants for the [Fighting Ebola Grand Challenge for Development](#) award. This one-year initiative, which launched in June 2015, is funding the continued scale-up of mHero in Liberia as well as mHero implementation in Guinea and Sierra Leone. A focus of IntraHealth's Grand Challenge initiative is supporting iHRIS in the respective countries and implementing mHero to aid in recovery efforts as ministries of health lead in rebuilding national health systems.

Liberia's MOHSW has identified a variety of new ways to use mHero for communicating with its health workforce, including identifying needs for mental health services, collecting information about nutrition services, and connecting with warehouse managers. mHero also has been used to collect data for a national USAID-funded health information system and an information, communications, and technology infrastructure assessment. The wide use of mHero demonstrates the recognition on the part of MOHSW leadership of the potential value of this communication system, not only for its ability to rapidly respond to future emergencies, but also for the integral role it can play in strengthening health systems.

In October 2015, IntraHealth, as part of a CDC Global Security Award to International Medical Corps, began working with the Ministry of Health in Mali to use mHero as a key tool in the implementation of the country's Integrated Disease Surveillance and Reporting Strategy. IntraHealth will support mHero implementation in Mali's Sikasso and Segue regions to implement use cases related to the strategy and, in general, improve communication to health workers.

EBOLA HEALTH WORKFORCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

IntraHealth has provided technical assistance to USAID, including conducting an analysis of the health professional schools in Liberia and helping to prepare for the WHO Executive Board meeting on Ebola in January 2015. We have helped map emergency and long-term health workforce responses to the epidemic, develop health systems responses, track the causes of health worker absenteeism during the outbreak, and create incentive plans to encourage health workers to return to work. Paying health workers and supplying them with adequate personal protective equipment is essential, but not enough; health workers need greater holistic support through stress management, supportive supervision, and ensuring that their families' basic needs are met.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

IntraHealth's commitment to health workers includes addressing a wide range of occupational safety and health (OSH) hazards to improve performance and service quality, develop and implement standards, and advocate for enabling policies that ensure health worker safety and well-being. IntraHealth conducted an OSH landscape assessment in six countries, including Mali and Senegal in West Africa, and is developing strategies for designing OSH frameworks, particularly in high-risk contexts. IntraHealth is poised to work closely with ministries of health and other partners and stakeholders to assess health worker safety and security needs, design safety and security plans, and develop and implement other strategies to safeguard the health of those who risk their lives to save others.

IntraHealth is seeking additional partners to support countries in addressing the current Ebola outbreak and strengthening emergency response and long-term recovery efforts. Please reach out to us using the contact information below.

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