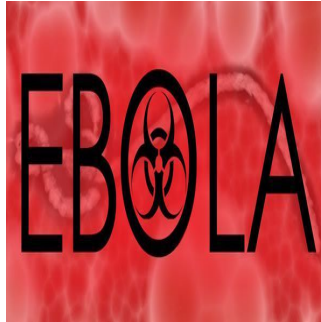

Ebola Lessons for Critical Care



According to the editors of the American Journal of Critical Care (AJCC), the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa offers insight as to how healthcare professionals could respond more effectively to current and future healthcare challenges.

Cindy Munro, RN, PhD, ANP and Richard H. Savel, MD, the two Editors-in-Chief at AJCC review and reflect on the frontline role that critical care providers can play during outbreaks. Munro is the Associate Dean for research and innovation at the University of South Florida College of Nursing in Tampa and Savel serves as director, surgical critical care, at Maimonides Medical Center and as professor of clinical medicine and neurology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, both in New York City.

“Outbreaks reinforce the importance of critical care knowledge, skill and teamwork in uncertain situations,” Munro said. “Infectious diseases have always posed risks for healthcare providers, and it’s our duty to use all our knowledge and skills to protect ourselves, our patients and the public, and to prepare for future challenges.”

Ebola, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and other disease outbreaks highlight the need for healthcare providers to pay attention and be ready to respond. Viral diseases should not be viewed in terms of international boundaries and the perception that they are geographically distinct problems that do not concern people outside that region is wrong.

It is important to understand the pathogenesis and transmission of such diseases and to utilise the knowledge and skills of critical care providers. Viral outbreaks require high levels of infrastructure, knowledge and skills for effective preventive efforts and supportive care. The AJCC editors point out that outbreaks such as Ebola highlight the importance of the basics as a foundation for clinical practice.

There are certain elements that are central to infection control and for interrupting the transmission of viral pathogens. These include hand washing, using personal protective equipment and pristine techniques. Teamwork and accountability are also important for ensuring that care providers adhere to infection control protocols.

The editors call for more research to improve the understanding of animal sources of potential pathogens and zoonotic transmission. They also highlight the need for surveillance of viral pathogens in animals and consider it vital for the prevention of future outbreaks.

Source: American Journal of Critical Care

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