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October 20, 2014

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In light of the vulnerabilities that the Ebola crisis has exposed in our nation's public health preparedness, I respectfully urge you to consider designating regional hospital hubs that are prepared to provide specialized treatment and care for diagnosed Ebola patients while also serving as a source of technical assistance and support to other hospitals in the region.

The two recent cases of nurses who contracted the Ebola virus while caring for a patient at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital have raised serious concerns about the preparedness of local hospitals across the country and their ability to treat Ebola patients without exposing healthcare workers to undue risks. The comments made by nurses at the Texas hospital regarding inadequate protective gear, a lack of hands-on training and absence of guidance on appropriate protocols needed to protect healthcare workers are also deeply disturbing. Nurses and other front-line health workers are putting their lives at risk. It is clear that our nation's local hospitals need additional support and guidance, including technical expertise, equipment and extensive training for healthcare workers, in order to safely care for Ebola patients while also protecting themselves.

Having the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) deploy rapid response "SWAT" teams to respond to new domestic cases of Ebola is an important step toward providing hospitals with the necessary support and guidance. However, it will take time, and may prove logistically impossible for some local hospitals to adopt the appropriate protocols for treating Ebola patients, to adequately train their healthcare workers, and to equip their facilities with the necessary isolation spaces, equipment and supplies. As the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Anthony Fauci, has stated, "the idea that every single hospital can take care of a seriously ill Ebola patient... is just not true." Instead, these patients should be able to be identified and then sent to a "place where you have pre-trained people who know how (to care for an Ebola patient)".

We must be prepared to respond immediately and safely to any new domestic cases of Ebola that are found in our healthcare system. There are only four hospitals with biocontainment facilities in the United States, and, together, they have a total of 11 beds that can be used at any

one time for Ebola patients.¹ Four of those beds are currently occupied by Ebola patients. In the event that those facilities become full, it is imperative that we are prepared to isolate and treat newly diagnosed Ebola patients at appropriate alternative locations.

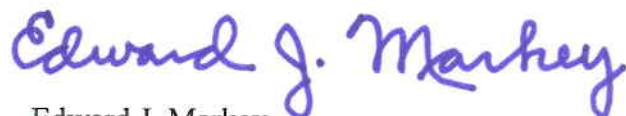
For those reasons, I recommend that you direct the CDC to designate a hospital in each geographic region of our country as a regional hub for the treatment of Ebola. CDC infectious disease experts would provide extensive training to all healthcare workers at these regional hospital hubs, ranging from doctors and nurses to laboratory technicians and custodial staff, regarding the appropriate safety protocols for Ebola cases and the proper use of personal protective gear and disposal of contaminated waste. As we have seen in recent days, the use of personal protective equipment is complicated, and extensive training is essential to ensure that our country's healthcare workers are adequately protected as they care for Ebola patients. The regional hospital hubs under the guidance of the CDC would provide opportunities for these healthcare workers to participate in preparedness drills and other hands-on activities, reinforcing the safety training and allowing them to practice employing the protocols and using the personal protective equipment in realistic scenarios. These designated hospitals should also be provided extra financial resources that can aid in the expense of preparing their spaces and staff for dealing with the complexities of caring for an Ebola patient.

These regional hospital hubs would improve our ability to treat any future domestic Ebola cases in several important ways. First, any new patients diagnosed with Ebola within the United States would immediately be transported to the closest regional hospital hub for treatment. Each regional hospital hub would be equipped with physicians that have expertise in diagnosing and treating infectious diseases such as Ebola, healthcare workers specifically trained to care for Ebola patients, and all of the equipment, training, and resources necessary to treat patients with Ebola safely and effectively.

In addition, the regional hospital hubs would be invaluable sources of technical expertise and guidance to healthcare providers and other hospitals in the region. Even if any new domestic Ebola cases are sent to regional hospital hubs for treatment, all hospitals will still need to be capable of assessing and accurately diagnosing patients with Ebola who present to emergency rooms. Regional hospital hubs could help by providing technical assistance to healthcare providers regarding the diagnosis of Ebola patients.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey

cc: Dr. Tom Frieden, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/us-capacity-11-ebola-patients-specialized-hospitals/story?id=26251721>