

COORDINATION OF PUBLIC INSTITUTION RESPONSE TO A THREAT OF EPIDEMIC

Workshop held in the National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene
on 11th September 2014

Having considered the dynamics of Ebola virus disease epidemic (EVD) in the West African countries, on 11th September 2014, a workshop regarding the coordination of public institution response to a threat of epidemic was held in the National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene (NIPH-NIH). Meeting was intended for the organs of the State Sanitary Inspectorate, the representatives of the provincial emergency management centers, provincial physicians-coordinators of medical rescue, national and provincial consultants of the following specialties: family medicine, internal diseases, paediatrics, emergency medicine, epidemiology, infectious diseases and epidemiology nursing.

Representatives of the Ministry of National Defence, i.e.: the Chief Sanitary Inspector of the Polish Army, the Director of the Military Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, the Chief of the Epidemiological Response Centre of the Polish Armed Forces, the representatives of the Government Centre for Security, the Chief Sanitary Inspector of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), the State Provincial Sanitary Inspectors of the MOI, physician-epidemiologist of the Headquarters of Polish Border Guard as well as the representatives of airport medical centers and National Health Fund also participated in this meeting.

Prof. Mirosław Wysocki, MD, PhD, the Director of the NIPH-NIH, and dr Igor Radziejewicz-Winnicki, PhD, the Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Health, jointly presided at workshop.

Workshop was composed of three thematic sessions: - **Session 1** was dedicated to an analysis of patient suspected of haemorrhagic fever (HF) in the District Hospital in Cieszyn. Dr Grzegorz Hudzik, State Provincial Sanitary Inspector in Katowice, State District Sanitary Inspector in Cieszyn and Chief Medical Officer of the Hospital in Cieszyn presided at this session.

The representatives of Śląskie province precisely discussed the management and response to the occurrence of first patient suspected of Ebola virus disease, finally non-confirmed, in Poland.

An emphasis was put on both strong and weak points of preparedness plans adopted. Problematic is-

suess and advantages of well-organized health care unit were subject to discussion.

Furthermore, dr Dariusz Cichy, State Provincial Sanitary Inspector in Gdańsk, discussed cases suspected of EVD, reported in Pomorskie province.

- **Session 2**, held in the form of panel discussion and moderated by dr Marek Posobkiewicz, Chief Sanitary Inspector, concerned the coordination of prophylactic response in Poland.

Chief Sanitary Inspector discussed fundamental elements of response to the occurrence of case of highly dangerous and contagious disease, focusing on legal basis of actions undertaken by services, inspectorates and other institutions as well as different response elements, including:

- provision of personal protective equipment for health care personnel,
- transport of suspected or confirmed HF cases to designated hospitals,
- organization of health care, focusing on hospital isolation,
- transport of specimen collected from suspected or confirmed EVD cases to the NIPH-NIH for diagnostic purposes,
- management of persons in contact with suspected or confirmed EVD cases, especially organization of quarantine settings for persons in contact with such patients,
- organization of work and principles of information exchange in situations of the occurrence of passenger presenting with symptoms indicative of HF on international airports,
- methods of information exchange, including principles of media policy.

Participants of meeting shared their own experience and reflections regarding current healthcare policy, necessities induced by current and potential global epidemiological situation of infectious diseases and opportunities resulting from current healthcare-related provisions. Discussions were held with regard to the organization of prophylactic actions in Poland as well as

approach to an epidemic threat specified in emergency management plans.

- **Session 3** related to epidemiological and clinical aspects of EVD. Dr Iwona Paradowska-Stankiewicz, MD, PhD, the National Consultant in Epidemiology, was a moderator of this session.

Prof. Andrzej Zieliński, MD, PhD, representing the Department of Epidemiology, discussed an epidemic of EVD in west Africa with EVD-related risk for the EU countries.

Prof. Andrzej Horban, MD, PhD, the National Consultant in Infectious Diseases, illustrated the clinical presentation of EVD as well as the principles of patient's isolation and protection of healthcare personnel.

Assoc. Prof. Bogumiła Litwińska, PhD, the Head of the Department of Virology, focused on the rules and national capacity regarding laboratory diagnostics of EVD. Assoc. Prof. Rafał Gierczyński, PhD, the Deputy Director for Epidemiology and Microbiology, discussed the role of NIPH-NIH in the formation of substantive and educational grounds in such events.

Speech delivered by Mrs. Monika Wróbel-Harmas, MA, Public Relations Officer of the NIPH-NIH, finalized this session. PRO presented the importance of information policy and contact with media.

Prof. Mirosław Wysocki, MD, PhD, summarized the findings of this workshop.

Having considered the questions and technical doubts raised (diagnostics, treatment, response to epidemic, exchange information), Professor emphasized that up-to-date materials, recommendations, algorithms of management and other information on EVD epidemic in west Africa, which were elaborated jointly by the experts of the NIPH-NIH, national consultants and CSI representatives, are accessible on the official websites of the NIPH-NIH and CSI.

As the information available on these websites are continually updated, users are advised to track them on a regular basis. Each person may verify the relevance of data as each document in Polish language is marked by the date of its latest modification.

Assoc. Prof. Rafał Gierczyński, PhD, who was also involved in the summary part of the workshop, reminded that in 2001, during terrorist attacks with the endospores of *Bacillus anthracis* in the USA, the NIPH-NIH processed more than 300 samples. From the perspective of current epidemic situation in west Africa,

it may suggest that the number of cases suspected of EVD in Poland may be also high, even, if none of these cases would finally be confirmed.

CONCLUSIONS

1. So far, all actions undertaken by different institutions in country with reference to the management of suspected EVD cases, suggest both positive aspects of healthcare-related provisions, as well as fields that require further discussions and implementation of explicit complementary actions.
2. Having referred to the Art. 42 of the Act on Preventing and Combating Human Infections and Infectious Diseases of 5 December 2008, the Minister of Health would officially designate hospitals for infectious diseases in Poland which would be prepared for admission and treatment of patients suspected of highly contagious and dangerous infectious diseases. Such solution is of measurable benefits, including permanent training of personnel for professional and safe management of patients, sustained funding for preparedness, routine provision of professional equipment and rooms meeting the safety standards, designation of specialist institutions, which could serve as national specialist centers for highly dangerous diseases, consequently leading to elimination of barriers associated with anxiety raised by having contact with highly infectious disease case.
3. Similarly to other EU countries, constant, system-adjusted preparedness regarding microbiological diagnostics of highly infectious diseases should be sustained. Having considered the previous engagement of the NIPH-NIH in this respect (monitoring of epidemiological situation during EURO 2012, execution of agreement on testing for MERS-CoV in 2013 and current involvement in EVD diagnostics), for the Minister of Health, the Institute, could maintain a constant state of readiness with regard to diagnostics of highly infectious diseases as well formulate recommendations for the purposes of epidemiological surveillance and trainings for healthcare personnel within the operation of the National Research Institute.
4. Organizers of this workshop, as well as its participants, remarked that there is a necessity of more frequent convoking of such meetings by the NIPH-NIH, not only those with regard to EVD-related threat.