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Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone need us to hear their voice

Mary Ann McGivern | Aug. 6, 2014 NCR Today

Public radio host Diane Rehm aired a show July 31 on Ebola. You can listen here [1]. Like most of us, I wanted to hear onset symptoms (fever), incubation time (seven to 21 days), treatment (hydration and palliative care by people totally enclosed in heavy, hot garb) and hopes for a vaccine (two to seven years).

Our temptation is to say that these are scary countries and we should just wall them off and forget about them and hope we don't get this virus. That's what guest Laurie Garrett said. She is senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, and she caught my heart. You can read her words in the transcript [2].

Laurie Garrett reminds us that these are very poor countries, impoverished countries. They have been invaded, preyed upon by their own rulers, fought brutal civil wars and had their children stolen by armies that rely on child soldiers. They are understandably hostile to foreigners totally encased in plastic who tell them to give their loved ones to the foreigners for medical care, to establish a quarantine, and to end the practice of holding funerals.

These countries have no resources to deal with a virulent epidemic, and other countries that surround them and trade with them have started to close their doors, impose border protections and talk about sanctions. The presidents of Liberia and Sierra Leone have imposed military quarantine, and they have both canceled trips to Washington, D.C., for the big U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit called by President Barack Obama at the White House.

Laurie Garrett says it is tragic that these two countries are not able to plead their case in Washington at this summit. "And I really hope that the Obama administration and the Cameron administration in the U.K. and the Africa summit recognize the very desperate need to not only support the battle against the virus, but to also be there to help build these countries back up, help them recover from this desperation and come up with decent health systems once this is all over with."

Then the discussion veered to the lack of funding for the World Health Organization and for the National Institutes of Health, as well. All my disgust for Congress, on its five-week vacation, rises up within me. What is the point of being the richest country in the history of the world if we don't use that wealth to make all our lives better?

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Links:
[1] http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2014-07-31/understanding-deadly-ebola-virus
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