Ebola in Africa: beyond epidemics, reproductive health in crisis

According to WHO, more than 5000 people have died from Ebola, including 240 health workers.\(^1\)\(^2\)

We are deeply concerned about the devastating effect of Ebola on reproductive health in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the context of continuous deterioration of socioeconomic conditions and general health in affected countries.\(^3\)

The indirect negative effect of Ebola on reproductive health stems mainly from the desertion of already understaffed health facilities by health-care workers who are fearful of contracting Ebola. This fear is further increased because of pregnancy, childbirth, and post-partum related complications, including haemorrhage, eclampsia, obstructed labour, and abortion, will not have necessary and even life-saving care and attention. United Nations Population Fund estimates that 15% of the 800 000 women who will give birth in the next 12 months in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone could die of complications because of inadequate emergency obstetric care,\(^4\) and thousands of others could develop devastating pathological conditions, such as obstetric fistula.

Increased support to fight Ebola is needed in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone coupled, with specific attention to reproductive health services. Adequate measures, including health system strengthening and community mobilisation coupled with an enabling environment for provision of emergency obstetric care, need to be put in place urgently to avoid devastating short-term and long-term effects for thousands of women.

We declare no competing interests.

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Figure: Numbers of patients at the Matam maternity Hospital, Conakry, Guinea, in 2013 and 2014