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Ebola Puts Spotlight on Bellevue, Key NYC Trauma Center

Staff Has Been Training for More Than 2½ Months to Handle Ebola Cases, Officials Say

By **TED MANN**

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Bellevue Hospital officials say staff has been training for more than 2½ months to handle any suspected Ebola cases. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

Bellevue Hospital Center handled nearly 116,000 emergency patients in 2013. Now, the focus will be on just one.

[The first Ebola case in New York](#) turns the spotlight on the city's marquee trauma center, which will be tested with containing the disease in one of the country's most crowded urban areas.

The hospital has been at the center of fast-developing plans from health officials and the state, city and federal governments to isolate and treat Ebola-infected patients. Those plans have involved drills, isolation wards and close monitoring of staff to head off some of the potential missteps that may have allowed the disease to spread to health-care workers in Texas.

Bellevue officials say staff at the 828-bed complex overlooking the East River in Manhattan has been training for more than 2½ months to handle any suspected case of the disease.

Preparations have included drills to practice donning and removing protective masks, gowns and other gear, according to the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, which operates Bellevue. The hospital is relying on a buddy system, in which one worker

observes another to monitor for breaches that could lead to contamination when putting on or removing the gear, HHC Chief Executive Ramanathan Raju said Thursday morning in remarks to the organization's board.

Thursday evening, people familiar with the matter said Craig Spencer, a 33-year-old physician who had returned to New York City 10 days ago after treating Ebola patients in West Africa, has tested positive for the deadly disease.

Dr. Spencer likely will be treated in one of four single-bed hospital rooms Bellevue has set up in its infectious disease ward to handle patients deemed likely to have Ebola while limiting exposure to medical personnel and other patients. To further limit risks the disease could spread in the hospital, Bellevue announced earlier this month that it had set up a facility to test blood samples for possible Ebola infection in that section of the hospital.

“We will limit as much as possible the number of people who have contact with the patient, and ensure that those people are at the highest level of experience and competency,” Dr. Ram said.

Thursday night, people passing through the hospital's soaring atrium, including doctors and nurses still in lab coats, paused to watch a crowd of more than two dozen reporters waiting for a formal announcement from New York Gov [Andrew Cuomo](#) and Mayor [Bill de Blasio](#) about the case.

In a statement earlier Thursday, the hospital said it was “particularly well suited” to handle Ebola patients thanks to years of preparation for other epidemics and experience running isolation wards for other diseases such as tuberculosis.

The first confirmed case of Ebola in the U.S. was initially misdiagnosed at the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas, where [one Ebola patient died](#) after apparently [infecting two nurses](#) who helped care for him.

Hospitals in the HHC network have sent “secret shoppers” to their emergency rooms—patients who arrive complaining of symptoms consistent with Ebola to ensure they are properly diagnosed and treated.

Dr. Spencer was diagnosed after treating patients in Guinea. He reported a fever and gastrointestinal problems Thursday morning and had quarantined himself in his Upper Manhattan apartment.

The HHC decided early on to rely on Bellevue as the chief treatment center for potential Ebola cases, Dr. Ram said. Founded in 1736, Bellevue is the country’s oldest continuously operated hospital, according to the city’s website. Doctors there treated Alexander Hamilton after he was fatally shot in an 1804 duel with Aaron Burr.

Bellevue’s is the city’s leading trauma unit. Its Emergency Department has the highest level designation for trauma, including neurological trauma, amputations and poisoning, according to its website.

New York City police officers wounded in the line of duty are customarily taken directly to Bellevue’s trauma center for treatment from locations all over the city, former city officials said.

“Of all the places that are preparing, Bellevue is by far the best prepared,” an official at a city health-care facility said.