

Two Cuban Ebola Experts Coming To Train Health Care Workers

Two experts are to arrive in the island from Cuba next week, to assist with the training of health care workers and other designated Ebola frontline responders.

This will form part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalize Cuba's commitment to provide technical assistance to strengthen Jamaica's Ebola preparedness and response, which is to be established between the governments of both countries.

These were the key outcomes of a four-day visit to Cuba, from October 23 to 26, by an 11-man Jamaican delegation, led by Health Minister, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, for discussions with his counterpart, Dr. Roberto Morales Ojeda, to lobby that country's assistance in boosting the local response to the Ebola threat. This came after Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, sought assistance from Cuban President, Raul Castro, with whom she had dialogue several weeks ago. The Minister outlined details of the visit during a media briefing at the Ministry's downtown Kingston offices, on Tuesday, October 28. Dr. Ferguson said the MoU will facilitate consultations between Cuba's Pedro Kouri Institute of Tropical Medicine (IPK), the state agency through which all Ebola-related activities in that country are managed, and several local institutions. The Minister said following discussions with Dr. Ojeda, the delegation visited the IPK, adding that his counterpart agreed to establish the MoU "on my request." Dr. Ferguson explained that under the agreement, the IPK will have consultations with broad-based technical institutions of the Jamaican Government, including the National Commission on Science and Technology, which is chaired by Prime Minister Simpson Miller. In addition, he said the IPK will also have discussions with academic institutions, inclusive of the University of the West Indies (UWI); University of Technology (UTech); and Northern Caribbean University (NCU), adding that "we will seek to include all other critical institutions in this process." Dr. Ferguson advised that the two experts will be in Jamaica for two weeks in the first instance. He said they will focus on "training the trainers," who, in turn, will train other designated frontline responders, inclusive of health workers, and officers from the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), Jamaica Fire Brigade (JFB), Immigration and Customs. Another key input will be the timely arrival of 30 Cuban health care workers in November, under the existing bilateral arrangement between both countries. The group, which will comprise doctors, nurses, and dentists, among other categories, will be incorporated into the Ebola preparedness programme. Dr. Ferguson said they will receive training from the Cuban government prior to their arrival, as part of the current human resource agreement, adding that they have "also undertaken to train those Cuban health workers who are already in Jamaica." Director of Strategic Human Resource Management in the Ministry, Benjamin Waysome, who was part of the delegation, stated that "what the Minister has asked for is that as part of the (Ebola) preparation... that this group (of 30), as well as every subsequent group that will come, be trained in Ebola management and protection." "So, it gives us the option here, to utilize these persons, as we see fit, based on what our circumstances are," he further explained. Meanwhile, Dr. Ferguson said Cuba has agreed to share information with Jamaica regularly on the progress of the Ebola response in West Africa through its control centre, "to keep us updated on the epidemiological situation and other important information required for decision making." He added that Cuba has also undertaken to deploy doctors and nurses to assist in the response, in the event Jamaica experiences an outbreak. In relation to equipment, Dr. Ferguson said that, "we are still awaiting a formal response to the request for Cuba to provide additional protective equipment and contact tracing kits for managing potentially exposed persons (should such cases arise)." Reassuring that surveillance is being strengthened at all ports of entry, Dr. Ferguson pointed out that the administration is also moving to monitor the "unofficial" points, in particular fishing villages. "I have had discussions with the Agriculture Minister, Hon. Derrick Kellier, and the State Minister, Hon. Luther Buchanan, who has responsibility for fishing villages. Minister Buchanan will be liaising with the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities to begin a programme of sensitization for the fisherfolk," he said. "We have been steadily making progress with our preparations for Ebola," Dr. Ferguson added, and gave the assurance that the Health Ministry will continue to lead the process. The Minister said the Ministry will continue to work with its partners, including the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), "which has been very involved in working with us to put systems in place towards creating an effective and efficient response mechanism in all phases."