

Ebola-hit UK nurse treated with survivor's plasma, trial drug

December 31 2014, by Robin Millard

A British nurse who contracted Ebola in west Africa is being treated with the blood plasma of someone who survived the virus and an experimental anti-viral drug, the doctor supervising her care said Wednesday.

Pauline Cafferkey, who had been volunteering at a British-built treatment centre in Sierra Leone, is being treated at the Royal Free hospital in London, which has the only isolation ward in Britain equipped for Ebola sufferers.

Doctor Michael Jacobs said she was sitting up, reading and talking to medics from inside her isolation tent but warned that the Ebola virus was unpredictable and that her health could get worse.

"We've decided to treat her with two things, the first of which is convalescent plasma," Jacobs told reporters.

"The second thing that we've given her is an experimental antiviral drug."

The plasma was taken from the blood of a patient successfully treated in Europe and chosen from a shared European stockpile as the most appropriate for Cafferkey. The antibodies it contains should help her fight the virus, Jacobs explained.

The experimental drug is not ZMapp, the drug used to treat fellow

British volunteer nurse William Pooley, who recovered from Ebola, because "there is none in the world at the moment", Jacobs said.

"There is no specific treatment for Ebola that has been proven to work," he emphasised.

Cafferkey is the first person to test positive for Ebola in Britain and the second to be treated for the virus in the country after Pooley, who has since returned to Sierra Leone.

Cafferkey expressed concern about her temperature to airport officials when she returned to London from Sierra Leone via Casablanca in Morocco on Sunday.

Her temperature was taken at London Heathrow Airport but did not raise alarms and she was cleared to take a connecting flight home to Glasgow.

She was eventually diagnosed with Ebola on Monday and flown from a Glasgow hospital to London on a military plane.

Treatment went 'very smoothly'

"Ebola runs a very variable course and the next few days are going to be very critical," Jacobs said.

"Things may get worse; we hope that the treatment will make her better," he said, adding that Cafferkey was in the very early stages of the [virus](#) and the situation would be clearer in a week's time.

He said the medical team looking after her had discussed treatment options with her.

She has also been in communication with her family through an

intercom, though they can see one another.

"She's as well as we can hope for at this stage of the illness," said Jacobs.

"She's had the [treatment](#), it's gone very smoothly, no side-effects at all."

The British government's chief medical officer Sally Davies told ITV television that there would be a review of airport screening procedures even though Cafferkey "had no symptoms" at Heathrow.

"Her temperature was within the acceptable range," she said.

A doctor who travelled back to London with Cafferkey had complained of "shambolic" screening procedures in Britain.

Meanwhile two patients who recently returned to Britain from west Africa tested negative for Ebola.

The two had been tested separately at hospitals in Aberdeen in Scotland and Cornwall in southwest England.

The patients were unconnected to Cafferkey.

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