

Media statement

30 September 2019

Environmental Health Officer awarded for work during Ebola outbreak

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Environmental Health Officer Paul Endres was the recipient of an Australian Honours Award at Government House in Canberra for his work in the Ebola Response in Sierra Leone in 2015.

Mr Endres received the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal (West Africa Clasp). This award is presented to those who perform humanitarian service in a foreign country, particularly those working in dangerous environments or conditions or during a humanitarian crisis.

“I’m incredibly humble and honoured to receive the Australian Humanitarian Overseas Services Medal, it was very unexpected,” Mr Endres said.

In 2015, Paul was deployed to Sierra Leone, West Africa, the worst effected country of the Ebola outbreak, as a WASH (Water and Sanitation Hygiene) Environmental Health Officer with a UK medical team at the Kerry Town Treatment Unit.

For several months he provided emergency humanitarian relief in extremely hazardous circumstances for the Ebola outbreak response. The primary role of unit was to manage Ebola survivors and victims who were health practitioners such as doctors, nurses and other health care workers.

“I was approached to be deployed due to my expertise in Disaster Management, having co-ordinated incident responses such as tropical cyclones, floods and bushfires during my time working for Queensland Health in Public Health Units.

“I was very keen to offer any help possible in responding to the worst disease outbreak in living memory, certainly one of the worst in history,” Mr Endres said.

Environmental Health Officers have a very diverse skill-set which makes them an ideal choice to combat situations like this. In his role, Paul had primary responsibility for monitoring, oversight, and maintaining exceptional infection control standards at the Unit for the Ebola outbreak response, including

- hand-washing and other infection control practices/Safe Cleaning of Spills
- Cleaning and Disinfection of Deceased Person Areas
- Venomous snake habitat assessments
- Supervision of Patient Arrival and Disinfection practices

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- Food Safety including hygiene inspections the kitchens
- Water Supply Monitoring, Treatment and Quality, chlorination program
- Blood-borne Pathogens control
- Vaccine Preventable Diseases Program
- Waste Management, including incineration and disposal of Hazardous and Infectious Waste
- Coordinated Control Programs including inspections, larval survey, residual spraying, response to notified cases of disease (eg. Malaria).

To carry out the complex operation in highly infectious zones always required vigilance from the unit. They dressed in infection control suits to protect all skin and mucous membranes from coming into contact with the virus. The team also had to take heat stress precautions, as internal temperatures inside the suits could exceed 50 degrees Celsius.

Tragically, the official number of Ebola cases from the outbreak was 28,652, which included 11,325 deaths. Healthcare workers caring for patients were among those at highest risk for contracting the disease, and there were thousands of carers who died.

Mr Endres said he has dedicated his award to the West African families affected, his wife, kids, family and friends who stood by him whilst he was deployed, and when he came home.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

Interview and photo opportunities are available with Paul Endres by request.

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