

"Primary healthcare important as first response to any epidemic"

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As per Dr Bobby John, executive director, Global Health Advocates, "In India, there is an entity called as Central Bureau of Health Intelligence which has its own network to gather information. But whether it really is functional and of any use in these situations is not known", he told BioSpectrum in a one-on-one chat and added further, "Structure is there but we have failed to utilize it to collect data on a regular basis. In case of outbreaks such as Ebola, we require real time data which in our case is largely missing. The level of preparedness is equivalent to disasters such as earthquakes and floods but we have repeatedly displayed that we haven't been able to respond in a quick manner."

Commenting on the government's encouragement to new drug research for these rare organisms, Dr John opined, "R&D into such diseases is ok but first we have to think about people who are infected. They always come up with basic symptoms such as fever, cough and breathing problems. They rather require primary attention and segregation on the basis of quick diagnosis. We lack orientation in that. Primary healthcare is as important as first response to any epidemic."

Giving an example of Japanese Encephalitis in Western Uttar Pradesh where the cases were reported from everywhere, Dr John stated that we have not really learnt to devise mechanisms to monitor the situation regularly despite the availability of data. Otherwise there would have been no repetitions year after year as per him. "These comments are a broad generalization as we surely lack orientation on such issues," he concluded.