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Are we prepared for the next novel pandemic? lessons learned from Ebola, SARS and other emerging diseases

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In 2014, the world was threatened by an epidemic outbreak of Ebola Virus. The World Health Organization reported that fear was one of the most significant barriers to containing the outbreak. Fearmongering, hostility and mistrust created an environment in which healthcare workers faced stigma and discrimination. One of the reasons this particular outbreak was difficult to contain was the lack of healthcare workers willing to treat the infected. In South Korea, the government withheld the names of health facilities where MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) victims were being treated. Widespread fear had significant effect on the economy and over 100,000 international tourists cancelled travel plans. During the SARS epidemic, some people endured fear and discrimination simply based on their presumed nationalities. In many countries, nurses provide the majority of direct care to patients with infectious diseases. They are also not immune to the forces of stigma applied not due to having the disease, but for caring for those who might be infected. They are also not immune to the distress of possibly infecting people they love. Ultimately, this can lead to fewer nurses being able or willing to provide care during a new epidemic. This lecture will explore recurring themes and reactions during novel epidemics. It will also explore possible ways to: mitigate psychological distress, identify strategies to optimize care and support the healthcare staff.