HIV Activists Lambast NY Governor on Ebola Quarantine

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More than 100 HIV advocates and specialists signed a letter to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo criticizing the state's 21-day quarantine of health care workers who have had contact with Ebola patients in West Africa, The New York Times reports.

The quarantine "is not supported by scientific evidence," states the letter, and it "may have consequences that are the antithesis of effective public health policy." Specifically, advocates noted that quarantines might fuel misinformation and panic, which could prevent someone with Ebola from seeking care. Such policies may also discourage health care workers from going to West Africa where they are needed to combat the epidemic.

Health officials criticize quarantines of asymptomatic people because they are not able to transmit the virus. Nonetheless, New Jersey, Connecticut, Florida and Illinois have joined New York in initiating quarantines. Cuomo stated that quarantines could take place in a person's home, but in New Jersey, a health care worker was kept for days in a tent.

Twelve people who signed the letter are members of an AIDS task force that Cuomo formed earlier this month with the purpose of reducing HIV infections by three-quarters before 2020. One such person is activist Peter Staley. He said the advocates' letter was addressed to the New York governor because "we have been asked to give advice on an illness that has a lot of stigma and fear affecting how we fight it, and this is our governor and we felt strongly that if we could get him to return to the national consensus on this, that in and of itself would put enormous pressure on [New Jersey] Governor Christie."

In related news, Staley joined Jeremiah Johnson of the Treatment Action Group and James Krellenstein of ACT UP New York to pen an op-ed in the Guardian titled "New York's Ebola Response Should Be Informed by Lessons Learned Fighting HIV. It Isn't."

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