

# Liberia's health system collapsing as Ebola spreads

By Stella Dawson for Reuters

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THE health care system in Liberia is collapsing, hospitals closing down and medical workers fleeing from the Ebola epidemic, which is poised to worsen, Liberia's foreign minister said on Thursday.

"People are dying from common diseases because the health care system is collapsing," Minister of Foreign Affairs Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan said in an interview with Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"It is going to have a long-term impact, even after this crisis is behind us."

Treatable diseases such as malaria and diarrhea are left untended because frightened Liberians are shunning medical centers, and these deaths could outstrip those from the Ebola virus by three or four fold, he said.

**But his biggest concern is the spreading epidemic.**

"We are hearing it is going to get worse before it gets better. We do not know how much worse that will be. My main worry is the fear of how many people will die. Right now it is out of control and jumps from place to place," Ngafuan said.

The number of trained doctors and nurses, already in critical short supply after years of civil war, is shrinking as medical workers get infected, quarantined or are afraid to report to work. The country entered the epidemic with only about 50 doctors for 4 million people, he said.

"What is happening is the entire health sector is being devastated by the crisis. It is not only a killer, but it kills those who care for them, and a good number of them are dying," Ngafuan said.

Overwhelmed, the three West African countries most affected by the Ebola virus - Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone - stressed at a meeting on Monday with top-level U.S. government officials, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Bank that a global response is critical, Ngafuan said.

