Nebraska Biocontainment Unit celebrates 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary

\textit{Dr. Rick Sacra, first Ebola patient treated in unit, highlights list of dignitaries attending}

The University of Nebraska Medical Center and its clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, will celebrate the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary Friday of the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit with a campus event bringing together leading government officials on the federal, state and city level as well as Rick Sacra, M.D., the first patient successfully treated for Ebola virus disease in the unit last September.

“This will be a well-deserved celebration,” said Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., UNMC chancellor and chairman of the Nebraska Medicine Advisory Board. “The incredible work of the physicians and staff in the Biocontainment Unit was recognized around the world. We couldn’t be more proud of what they’ve accomplished and how they have made the medical center an international leader in taking care of people with deadly infectious diseases and training other medical centers on the gold standard of care for these patients.”

In addition to Dr. Sacra, other dignitaries participating in the 2 p.m. celebration in the Truhlsen Events Center in the Michael F. Sorrell Center for Health Science Education include:

- Nicole Lurie, M.D., assistant secretary for preparedness and response, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts;
- Nebraska Rep. Brad Ashford; and
- Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert.

For Dr. Sacra, a Worcester, Mass., family physician who contracted Ebola while serving as a missionary physician in West Africa, it will be a memorable reunion.

“I consider those who cared for me from the Biocontainment Unit to be friends for life. So to have an opportunity to join them for a celebration is great,” he said. “I owe my life to this group of amazing people, and I appreciate them deeply.”

Dr. Sacra praised the medical center for its “amazing foresight and diligent preparation” in establishing the Biocontainment Unit in 2005. “Without this type of preparation, my evacuation from Liberia when I was ill and my treatment at such a facility would not have been possible,” he said.

He noted that he was recently asked to speak at a safety retreat for a Massachusetts hospital. “The main reason given was that I could give unique insight into the inner workings of the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit and could help them learn some of the strategies that the team used in approaching my care,” he said. “In other words, those who are ‘in the know’ about infection control and staff safety know the name of UNMC/Nebraska Medicine and want to find ways to emulate them.”

Over the past six months, the Biocontainment Unit treated three patients with Ebola and partnered with the Douglas County Health Department and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to monitor seven other patients with potential exposure to Ebola virus disease.

\textit{Continued on back}
During this same period, UNMC/Nebraska Medicine have been active in numerous other notable activities surrounding Ebola. These include:

- Providing Ebola training to more than 30 of the top hospitals and academic medical centers in the country;
- Developing online courses for other health care providers;
- Developing a series of webinars on Ebola care;
- Holding a research symposium in Omaha with leading infectious disease experts;
- Participating in a treatment study of experimental drugs used for Ebola patients;
- Having the unit’s medical director, Phil Smith, M.D., invited to attend the State of the Union address;
- Having three physicians (Drs. Gold, Smith and Angela Hewlett) invited to attend a White House ceremony recognizing caregivers of Ebola patients;
- Having President Barack Obama at the same event praise the medical center for delivering “world-class care” to Dr. Sacra;
- Having Dr. Gold testify before Congress;
- Becoming a partner with the World Health Organization in its Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN);
- Getting a resolution (LR 41) approved by the Nebraska Legislature to encourage Nebraska’s elected officials to work with federal agencies to establish a national training center at UNMC/Nebraska Medicine; and
- Having the Omaha World-Herald recognize the biocontainment team as “Midlanders of the Year.”

“It’s been quite a whirlwind of activity,” said Dr. Gold, who has spearheaded efforts for UNMC/Nebraska Medicine to gain federal designation as a national training center in highly infectious diseases. This is an open bidding process which is expected to take several months.

Dr. Smith, who is professor of internal medicine-infectious diseases at UNMC, praised the biocontainment team for “its outstanding performance under pressure.”

He added, “We are just very pleased to be able to contribute to the global effort to contain Ebola.”

During the first nine years, Dr. Smith estimated that the Biocontainment Unit held 50 half-day training sessions to be prepared should the unit be called into action.

With up to 10 beds, the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit is the largest such facility in the U.S. and one of only three in the country. The other biocontainment facilities are located at Emory University in Atlanta and at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

Friday’s event will be tweeted live at the hashtag #NEbiounit10. It also will be livestreamed at http://hog.unmc.edu/clients/channel1/channel1.html beginning at 1:40 p.m.

"Through world-class research and patient care, UNMC generates breakthroughs that make life better for people throughout Nebraska and beyond. Its education programs train more health professionals than any other institution in the state. Learn more at unmc.edu and follow us on social media.

"Nebraska Medicine leads the world in transforming lives to create a healthy future through extraordinary care, discovery and learning. The most esteemed academic medical center in the region, Nebraska Medicine offers exceptional patient care combined with innovative research and education. This newly integrated organization provides its patients with access to more than 1,000 physicians, 678 licensed hospital beds in Omaha and Bellevue, and nearly 40 specialty and primary care clinics in Omaha and the surrounding area. Find Nebraska Medicine online at www.nebraskamed.com."