



## The nature of Ebola

Sophie Smither is a senior scientist and Ebola expert from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL). She volunteered to go to Sierra Leone to help set up and run the diagnostics lab at the Kerry Town Ebola Treatment Centre, where the blood samples of patients were tested for Ebola. Here she describes what Ebola is and the scale of the outbreak.

*So Ebola is both a virus and the name of a disease that it causes. It's probably one of the nastiest diseases in the world because generally over at least half of the people that get infected die, so it's what we say is very high case fatality rates, a lot of mortality. It's a very simple little virus; there's not much to it, but that doesn't stop it being pretty effective. It was discovered in 1976. It was - originally only caused very small outbreaks in the central African region, the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], Gabon, there's variations of Ebola that have appeared in Sudan, and so on. And probably before last year there had maybe been a total of a thousand cases and then obviously this outbreak has just completely rewritten everything. We're up to - I think it's over 11,000 deaths and 27,000 cases, so it's just changed everything.*

## Contracting Ebola

Corporal Anna Cross was the third Briton to contract Ebola in Sierra Leone, in March 2015. She was serving as a nurse in the military part of the Kerry Town Ebola Treatment Centre. After specialist care at the Royal Free Hospital in London and treatment with an experimental drug, she made a full recovery. Here she describes the moment it was confirmed that she had Ebola.

*And then about midnight the doctor I knew really well came back and he said 'Anna it's not good news, and I'm really sorry, and you're positive'... And I had a horrendous amount in my blood, so I - that was also I think another one of those things where as a healthcare professional you don't want to know how sick you are, or your trajectory, or what it looks like to die of Ebola. I knew the patient that I'd looked after that had died only like a week before had had a very similar viral load to me, and that was when she was very sick, and I wasn't that sick yet. So it wasn't looking good at that time. And I think, it wasn't just hearing that I had Ebola, it was hearing that I wasn't doing well, I kind of, even when I was unsure I still thought 'I'm twenty-five, I'm really young, I'm fit, I should be fine'. Hearing that I think really brought things home to me that my body wasn't fighting it off, and why wasn't it fighting it off I should be able to. So yeah, that was a kind of another surreal moment.*