

Bethesda, Oct 25 (AP) - A nurse who caught Ebola while caring for a Dallas patient who died of the disease walked out of a Washington-area hospital virus-free and into open arms.

Nina Pham got a hug from President Barack Obama in the Oval Office at the White House on Friday. And outside the hospital where she had been since last week, she got hugs from the nation's infectious disease chief, who oversaw her care.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest called the meeting with Obama "an opportunity for the president to thank her for her service." But the close contact between the president and the former patient also came as officials in New York tried to calm fears after a doctor was diagnosed with Ebola in that city.

Pham said she felt "fortunate and blessed to be standing here today," as she left the National Institutes of Health's Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where she had been since she arrived Oct. 16 from Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas.

Pham thanked her health care teams in Dallas and at the NIH and singled out fellow Ebola survivor Dr. Kent Brantly, who recovered after becoming infected in Liberia, for donating plasma containing Ebola-fighting antibodies as part of her care.

"Although I no longer have Ebola, I know it may be a while before I have my strength back," Pham said at a news conference.

Pham arrived at a Fort Worth, Texas airport just before midnight CDT Friday.

CareFlite pilot Jason Davis said he flew Pham back to Texas and said, "she's great." Davis described Pham as being in "great spirits."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told reporters that five consecutive tests showed no virus left in her blood. Five tests is way beyond the norm, he stressed, but his team did extra testing because the NIH is a research hospital. He had walked out to the news conference with his arm around Pham and later gave her a big hug. "She is cured of Ebola, let's get that clear," Fauci said.

Pham stood throughout the approximately 20-minute press conference and was joined by her mother and sister. She read from a prepared statement and took no questions, but she called her experience "very stressful and challenging for me and for my family."

"I ask for my privacy and for my family's privacy to be respected as I return to Texas and try to get back to a normal life and reunite with my dog Bentley," she said, drawing laughter with the mention of her 1-year-old King Charles spaniel. Bentley has been in quarantine since Pham's diagnosis but has tested negative for the virus.

Pham is one of two nurses in Dallas who became infected with Ebola while treating Thomas Eric Duncan, who traveled to the United States from Liberia and died of the virus Oct. 8. The second nurse, Amber Vinson, is being treated at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, which on Friday issued a statement saying she "is making good progress" and that tests no longer detect virus in her blood.