

Naira Scarcity: Death Figures Spike In Hospitals

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By Our Reporters

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The current naira scarcity, occasioned by the currency swap policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), is taking a toll on healthcare services across the country.

Patients are increasingly denied access to care at health facilities as many of the facilities operate mainly cash-only systems or have poor e-payment systems. These facilities turn down transfers, insisting on cash payments before attending to patients.

Investigations by *Daily Trust on Sunday* revealed that as a result of these, many of the patients die at home or the facilities, or get worse while waiting to get cash to pay and access care.

Our reporters gathered that even at health facilities that operate e-payments systems, the absence of the alternative of cash payments due to naira scarcity had led to such long queues and network issues that patients get worse or are denied care all together.

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Pregnant woman dies over naira scarcity

It was a bitter experience for the family of James Auta, a resident of Kasuwar Magani in Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, who lost his pregnant wife due to failure to access cash in his bank and Point of Sale (POS) channels.

The incident happened early this month after Auta's wife went into labour but was rejected, simply because her husband couldn't make payment due to naira scarcity.

Daily Trust on Sunday gathered that the woman died at home after giving birth but continued to bleed.

The incident caused concerns across the state as patients and their family members found it difficult to make payments to access treatments due to the naira shortage.

Findings revealed that some patients face rejection in some hospitals for lack of cash.

Auwal Sani, whose younger brother was admitted at a private hospital at the Kudenda area of Kaduna said, "We face the same situation as hospital staff refuse to accept transfer; they prefer cash, which we don't have. However, they now allow us to make cash transfer since naira is scarce."

To mitigate the present challenges, the Kaduna State Government, through the Internal Revenue Service (KADIRS), directed all public hospitals to accept electronic transfer for all payments.

In his reaction, the executive chairman of the Kaduna State Internal Revenue Service, Dr Ziad Abubakar noted that the state had already abolished cash payments.

“Before the currency swap, the Kaduna State Government had abolished cash payments, pursuant to section 51 of the Kaduna State Tax Codification and Consolidation Law, 2020. So, there is no justification for public hospitals to reject electronic cash transfers,” he said.

He acknowledged that ‘the currency swap of the federal government has brought a lot of challenges to all the sectors of Nigeria’s economy.’”

He, however, said that in spite of the present situation, electronic cash transfer remained the only option of payment in public hospitals in the state going by the Tax Codification Law.

The commissioner for health in the state, Amina Baloni, could not be reached as her phone line failed to connect.