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MARCH 14, 2014

# WHAT MANNER OF HOSPITALS?



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(By Obi Ebuka Onochie)

*"Anybody walking into a hospital for its services has one of two things in mind: To be treated or to be checked and advised. But the alarming thing these days has to do with a situation whereby people walk in alive and are carried out dead. The rate of its occurrence has crossed the red line especially in the commercial city of Onitsha in Anambra State. It is dangerous to keep quiet at this moment when people who are barely sick, are being trucked to the morgue from the hospital. It would appear the number of people surviving hospital treatment is dwindling*

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*by the day.*"

The sanctity of human life universally taken as so serious that many individuals and countries attach capital punishment to the crime of taking another man's life without authority or for some economic gain. Whenever taking of life is mentioned, people's mind often conjures up assassins, police, military, corrupt judges, extra judicial killing in a mob action or even through diabolical means which is often called African science. None of these is as painful as one lost where lives are supposed to be saved, especially for possible economic reasons. Hospital according to Oxford advanced learner's dictionary is a large building where people who are ill/sick or injured are given medical treatment and care.

Anybody walking into a hospital for its services has one of two things in mind: To be treated or to be checked and advised. But the alarming thing these days has to do with a situation whereby people walk in alive and are carried out dead. The rate of its occurrence has crossed the red line especially in the commercial city of Onitsha in Anambra State. It is dangerous to keep quiet at this moment when people who are barely sick, are being trucked to the morgue from the hospital. It would appear the number of people surviving hospital treatment is dwindling by the day.

On February 14, which millions all over the world, especially the youths, celebrated St. Valentine, my neighbour's wife was in heart rending mourning as her husband of four years was laid to rest. What happened? On the morning of **January 28 this year**, he complained to his wife that he felt that something was moving in his stomach and would like to go to hospital to check it out. Naturally, as a good wife is wont to do, she joined her husband who drove to the hospital. The hospital ran a series of scans and told the man that there was nothing in his stomach and indeed nothing was wrong with him. He told the doctor that since nothing was wrong with him, he would like to go and prepare for the market. He would return should he notice anything afterwards. His wife at this point excused herself to go home to prepare their two children for school, leaving the husband with the doctor. That was the last time she would see her husband alive.

**Surprisingly, the doctor said he would like to administer on the man intravenous infusion (known to the uninitiated as drip) before he would allow him leave. The supposed 'patient' declined basing his argument on what the doctor had said earlier that he had found nothing wrong with him. The hospital insisted and, on second thought, believing it should know better, he agreed. He called his wife to inform her of the development. My neighbour, being on the bulky side, could be suffering from high blood pressure which experts contend has become the biggest silent killer in our world today. He was put on infusion. According to accounts, within minutes of the infusion being administered on him, he told the hospital authority to remove it, complaining that it was choking his chest. The hospital did not accede to this request. Out of pain he removed it himself. He felt the hospital probably did not understand what he was going through.**

**At this stage he fell off the bed and started gasping for breath. The next thing, he started reacting violently. The hospital tied his both hands and legs. In no time he passed away!**

**The same fate befell a middle-aged man also in the same Onitsha. He received an injection. These deaths are believed to be avoidable and are being attributed to evident failure of the state's government regulatory agency. Some of the nurses may need to be examined to ascertain the quality of their training. In this instant case, the victim was an outpatient. After he thought he was through he was told to stay behind for an injection. The account by those who know says he may have been given procaine penicillin at once instead of first administering a test dose to see if he would react to it or not. He slumped and before oxygen could be rushed to him he died. Everything lasted less than one hour.**

The experiences are giving cause for apprehension in the state. This calls for close monitoring of private

hospitals mushrooming in the land. It is feared many of the hospitals employ low quality auxiliary staff and use out-dated equipment. Not only are the bills high, there is a high level of deaths, too. All these are happening in a state where there is supposedly Ministry of Health. Anambra State is one of the few states in Nigeria that have eradicated polio and was promptly commended by the European Union. It must, therefore, be confounding that the same state does not appear to closely monitor goings on in private hospitals enough. Nobody is condemning polio eradication but the ministry should not pursue it at the expense of other health issues. After all, what is the benefit and happiness of saving children from polio who, by our own negligence, are likely be made orphans and their future put in great jeopardy?

The Ministry of Health may wish to take a cue from the Ministry of Education. In the past, the latter ministry embarked on inspection of schools, especially the private ones and many had to be closed down in the aftermath of the visitations.

We have seen the work of NAFDAC and SON in various markets and we have seen government tax officers updating their books by chasing shop owners and market men and women. We will like to know what is stopping the Ministry of Health from doing the same, to rid the state of phony clinics masquerading as private hospitals. How I wished that we were so organised that the Federal Ministry of Health can produce statistics of deaths for every state and the causes thereof. There is no doubt that we will be shocked that the issue is the same in the whole country and not peculiar to only Anambra State.

● Onochie is a public analyst from Onitsha.

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