

WHENEVER the word 'detain' is used, the first place that readily comes to mind is the prisons or cells of various security agents. This is so because they deal with criminal cases and may have to keep suspects in their custodies for various reasons.

Besides the prisons and the custody of security agents, hospitals too have been found to have begun to serve as detention grounds.

Checks showed that many of them, both government and private, have over the years been engaging in the practice of detaining their patients over unpaid bills. It was learnt that some of them detain not only patients, but also corpses.

A bereaved family has been unable to retrieve the remains of their dead relation from the custody of a hospital for burial because they could not raise money to offset the bills incurred in the course of treating their deceased relation.

The body of Afeez Kareem, a victim of live wire incident along Ikotun/Igando area, a suburb of Lagos State, is still in the custody of Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) over N500,000.00 outstanding medical bill.

Afeez and his friend, Prince Onyekachi, were victims of a live electricity wire incident that occurred along Igando/Ikotun road in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State sometime last year. They were thereafter taken to Gbagada General Hospital where they were kept under intensive care.

Afeez had his body burnt from his stomach down to his legs. He underwent two surgeries in quick succession and had the two legs cut off in the process.

In spite of this, his plight did not abate after the operations. The medical team told the family that he would have to undergo another round of surgical operations to stabilise his condition. He continued to writhe in pains on the hospital bed for a very long time because the family could not raise the money needed for the surgical operations.

He eventually died about a three weeks ago. He had accumulated so much debt in the course of his treatment in the hospital before his demise.

When the family approached the hospital for his remains, they were asked to pay the outstanding bill, which totalled N500,000, before

Electrocution:

Victim's body 'detained' over unpaid medical bill

they would be able to take his corpse.

Prince, on the other hand, had his right leg and his manhood badly affected in the incident. The affected leg was eventually cut off after a surgical operation. He remained under close medical observation for some time after the surgical operations.

Few weeks after his recovery, he was discharged but was not allowed to leave the hospital because of the outstanding bill he had accumulated in the course of his treatment. The hospital also requested the family to pay a sum of N500,000 before he could be allowed to leave the hospital.

The late Afeez's sister, Mrs Odunayo Adelaja, sounded despondent when our correspondent spoke with her on the phone. She sorrowfully said that they have chosen to leave the

Family pleads for mercy

■ Innocent DURU ■

remains of the deceased with the hospital because they couldn't raise the money.

"We are not blaming the hospital for the development. We would be ungrateful if we blame them. They tried their best for us but it was unfortunate that our brother did not survive. We are unable to raise the N500,000 outstanding bill they asked us to pay because we had incurred huge debts in the course of taking care of our brother's treatment.

"We want to have his remains for burial but there is no way we can get any money now. We are desirous of burying him so that it does not become what people will use to ridicule the family in the future. We are always sad

everyday because our minds and hearts are always on the matter.

"It causes psychological and emotional trauma for us because we often wonder what becomes of his remains if we end up not having the money to settle the bill. Our plight was compounded when we learnt that the bill would continue to increase for as long as his body is there. In fact, I even learnt that it has been on the increase since they kept him in the mortuary.

"We want to appeal to the government and well-meaning Nigerians to come to our help so that we can get the remains of our brother for burial. Web equally want to apologise to the hospital management for the development. It was not deliberate."

Prince's father, Mr Innocent Onyekachi, also bemoaned his son's predicament. He regretted that his son has remained in the custody of the hospital since he was discharged two weeks ago.

"I am in a fix as I am talking to you now. My son has been discharged by the hospital management but he has not been allowed to leave the hospital because of the outstanding bill. We were asked to pay a bill of N500,000 before he would be allowed to leave the hospital.

"The challenge is that I don't even have anybody to borrow me money again. I am just a local dry cleaner. I go from house to house to wash clothes for people. You can imagine what my income could be. I spent over N1 million on his treatment. This does not include the outstanding bill of N500,000. The money did not come from my pocket. I got it from kind-hearted people and borrowing. As I am talking to you now, I have a huge debt hanging on my neck. This is why it is even very difficult for me to get anybody to borrow me money again.

"I can only plead that the government and philanthropic Nigerians should come to my aid. I need their help for my son to come out of the hospital."

The Chief Medical Director of LASUTH, Prof David Adewale Oke, in his reply to a text message sent to him said he was unaware of the development. "I don't know anything about this," he simply said.

Before the cases of Afeez and Prince came up, Mercy, a victim of domestic violence, had similarly been detained by a private hospital owner in Lagos. She was severely burnt by her husband with hot pressing iron for allegedly sleeping with his 65-year-old father.

After some period of receiving treatment in the hospital, Project Alert, a non governmental organisation that was handling her case, said it was pertinent for her to see a burns specialist to facilitate her recovery. They demanded that she be discharged by the hospital but the

management declined. They requested that the victim's family should settle the outstanding bill of about N1 million before they could release her.

The doctor in a chat with our correspondent explained why she would remain in his custody. He said: "I also told them that they should pay the bill she has incurred if they want to take her away but they said they want to sign an agreement with me. I told them to write a cheque in their name if they didn't have cash and if at the end of the day the money is not paid, I can approach the EFCC to help me recover my money. No doctor would ever do that but I decided to do that purely on humanitarian ground. We gave them a bill of about N1.7million and now we have cut it down by half a million. This is for the first one month she spent with us.

"Now the woman has stayed for extra two weeks. I actually cut off about N450,000 from the bill and so far about N400,000 has been paid. As at that time, what was left as balance was around N930,000 but it has gone up now by say a million naira. They were pleading that I should cut down the bill but I made them to understand that what I have done is on humanitarian ground. If I should do otherwise, I would be undoing myself."

Emotions as family friends mourn couple in Lagos boat accident

■ Kunle AKINRINADE ■

SYMPATHISERS, including family members, have continued to express grief over the death of a couple, Isaac Akere and his wife, Yeye Foluke, who died in a boat accident, which happened in Ikorodu, Lagos State, last Wednesday.

The couple had slated their wedding for today but died while returning from Ebute Ero in Lagos Island when their boat sank en route Majidun, Ikorodu.

Isaac, who was a native of Ikoro-Ekiti, Ekiti State, was said to have met Foluke a few years ago after a fractured first marriage. The couple had been living together since 2011 but decided to put on hold their wedding ceremony because Foluke was by then carrying a pregnancy which produced a male child.

In some of the tributes posted on Isaac's wall on Facebook, one of his relations, Ibiwunmi Motunrayo, wrote: "You are a rare brother in a million. Farewell, till we meet to part no more."

Lamenting the loss of his sister, Samuel, who is a younger brother to Foluke, said: "... It is so sad to announce the death of my beloved, my sister and friend. We love her but God loves her much more. Olufoluke, Oluwabukola, Elizabeth, Dada. Remember you never told me that you will leave us so soon. Your wedding is just next weekend (today), but you did not wait to make the day a great one, why? Our mother can't stop crying...we brothers

•The late couple



•Afeez on his hospital bed before he eventually died. Inset: The deceased before he was electrocuted