

Jebose Boulevard

Where Life Happens



•Mekwunye and wife

NIGERIA'S GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS AS SLAUGHTER SLABS (II)

-Nollywood movie maker

In a most morbid tear jerking two part tale, Ekene Mekwunye, award winning movie director shares with readers how his father, who had shortness of breath, was misdiagnosed, denied oxygen by hospital staff and left to die at the Lagos State Teaching Hospital. The final part:

"The hospital theatre didn't send for my dad until 8pm. My dad had not eaten all day. I remembered him begging us to give him a little water that day. We kept pleading with him to hold on. I stood at the entrance of the theatre from 3pm waiting for one of the nurses to wheel my dad into the theatre for surgery. The doctors finally sent someone with a stretcher but to my dismay, it was a cleaner at the hospital! It didn't mean much to me then. The cleaner chatted with friends along the hallway, as she wheeled dad, without sense of urgency, to the surgery theatre. I wondered if it meant anything to him that he picked a patient at the emergency ward who had been waiting all day.

"The medical emergency ward had two entrances. One entrance that linked other buildings in the hospital was locked. It took the guard a while to get it open. The guard that forced the door open came to pick a patient who had been on oxygen but without an oxygen tube. He was to be accompanied by a nurse from the emergency ward, but nurses were unavailable, as the patient was being put on the stretcher. I couldn't believe such carelessness and inhuman treatments to patients at this hospital.

"The cleaner dumped my dad by the side of the theatre door and then yelled in Yoruba, 'I have brought the patient'. We were not allowed to go beyond the entrance but we could see further. It took the matrons about three minutes to come out. I pleaded with them that he had just been brought out of oxygen and needed to be back on oxygen as soon as possible. They laughed at me and one of them mockingly labelled me a 'junior doctor'. The other matron then said we had to pay. I told her I already paid at the ENT ward. I pleaded that I didn't have a problem with making another payment. I had my ATM card with me but needed my dad to be in surgery immediately. The matron looked disdainfully at my dad and said 'oh! he even has beard. How do you expect us to operate on him with the beard?' (He hadn't shaved in few days. His health was deteriorating fast.) And how were we supposed to know that? She then asked us to get shaving sticks that late in the night. My brother had to dash out in search of shaving sticks to buy. My dad was left by the side of the surgery room entrance. After my brother returned with the shaving sticks, they started shaving him. The matrons further complained that the shaving sticks were not sharp. My brother had to go for another set of shaving sticks while they ignored my dad. The nurse that accompanied us from the emergency ward was observing and wouldn't make a case to get him on oxygen.

"Later, dad was wheeled in for the operation. We really felt relieved. 'Finally', the family sighed and said to ourselves. After a few minutes, one of the doctors rushed to us and said they would not be able to go ahead with the operation anymore. We were all in shock and wondered what had happened. He said that his oxygen level had gone very low and that he was too weak to have the operation. At this point, we couldn't believe what the doctor told us. My brother and I rushed into the theatre. They hurriedly wheeled him out without oxygen. One of the doctors then asked the matron in charge of the theatre for a mobile oxygen cylinder for him to use on his way back to the emergency ward. Her response was 'which one did you bring when you were coming? Please excuse me'. They asked the cleaner to take my dad back to the emergency ward. One of the assistants almost broke my dad's hand as he wheeled him out whilst talking and not concentrating. My dad's hand had stuck to the door and he didn't realise it. I wished someone would wake me up from this nightmare but it was my reality.

"By the time we got back to the emergency ward, the door was locked and we got upset as we were rushing to get him back on oxygen. We pleaded with the gateman to hurry up. He started ranting before he went to get the key. By the time we got to where his bed was, dad had run out of oxygen. My father died. That was when the nurses and doctors started rushing to try to resuscitate him. They brought an oxygen mask and started administering CPR but it was too late. My mother suddenly became a widow and my siblings, without a father. We lost our esteemed father who died like he was nothing. He meant the whole world to us and other people. He died due to the carelessness, negligence of the staff of the general hospital.

"It's painful losing a husband and father, but what hurts more is the way we lost him. The hospital treated him like a piece of rubbish. My experience at LASUTH is unforgettable. I saw more people at the wards die in my three days than I had seen in my whole 38 years on earth. 'People died like it was in fashion. I would never forget a little boy who was constantly in pain as his parents watched helplessly. I would go to meet the nurses to come and attend to him and they would tell me to mind my business. I arrived that Tuesday morning and learnt that the boy had passed on. I later heard all he needed was a blood transfusion and his parents couldn't afford it. But our politicians are carting away billions. The nurses and matrons are constantly rude to patients and would even yell at them sometimes. I can't remember the number of times I went to remind them that the drip of a patient was empty and needed to be changed. They were mainly good at chatting with themselves at a corner where they sat all the time. For crying out loud, this was an emergency ward with the bold inscription at the entrance 'MEDICAL EMERGENCY' but they hardly treated anything as such.

This is a profession where five seconds could be a lot of time. If some people had five seconds, they could have been alive today. But they had no idea how important time is in saving lives. A lot of those deaths only happened because those people lived in Nigeria. Yea! That was their only crime. This is the reason the government officials in Nigeria send their kids to school abroad and travel outside the country to treat a headache. We need a real CHANGE.

"During the three days I spent at the government hospital, I observed a lot of things. I could understand that some of their departments were understaffed and they didn't have some of the funding required. I understand that. But what does it take to show care? Just to care like they are supposed to. When you care for people, it shows in your actions. These people took an oath to save lives in their profession. But they enabled deaths and sufferings. The care of few doctors and nurses there were overshadowed by the sea of wickedness. And with time, some of them became frustrated, coerced by colleagues or forced to join in the neglect of care. The hospital had patient care monitor team which responsibility included preserving the dignity of the patient and making sure patient receives the needed care at the hospital. But the monitors were rude and nasty. They neglected patients' call for assistance. Some of the patients would cry for help and assistance from their wards and hallways, but matrons and nurses would sit and ignore these helpless people. They would gather in groups and chat, ignoring cries for care from patients.

"My father's name was Peter Ezekolie Mekwunye. But this is no longer about my dad. I already lost him. Sadly, I cannot bring him back. But thousands of dads and other people would be visiting these hospitals. Are we going to allow the same things to happen to them? It's also not just about me fighting LASUTH. It happens in all government hospitals. As a matter of fact, LASUTH has one of the 'best' services for a government hospital and because the family did all we could, my dad got a lot more service than the average patient gets. So if this could still be happening, you can begin to imagine the decadence in our health sector and what it's like in many government hospitals.

"I miss my dad a lot. He was a fun loving person. He was fearless and always stood for the truth. He always wanted to help and had a heart of gold. He was a footballer as a youth and loved to watch football till he lost his sight about five years ago. But he still loved to discuss it. 'We argued a lot about football. He was a Chelsea FC fan. These past few days have been my worst. I smile at times but there are buckets of tears behind those smiles. I can't imagine what every December 23 would be like for my siblings and me as we have spent every one of them celebrating his birthday. I can't fight for him anymore but I can, for many others. We can't continue losing people because a few others refuse to do the job they are paid to do."