

Undergraduate denied treatment over bed space dies in LUTH

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By Naomi Chima

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The family of an undergraduate of the University of Port Harcourt, Deborah Doofan, has been thrown into mourning after she died outside the Emergency Ward of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Idi-Araba, Surulere, due to a lack of bed space to admit her into a ward in the hospital for prompt treatment.

PUNCH Metro gathered that until Doofan's death, she was suffering from hyperthyroidism, a medical condition associated with overactivity of the thyroid gland, resulting in a rapid heartbeat and an increased rate of metabolism.

Our correspondent learnt that Doofan, a 100-level student of Banking and Finance at UNIPORT, was studying in school when she suffered a crisis and was rushed to the UNIPORT Teaching Hospital.

Speaking with our correspondent, Doofan's elder brother, Prince, said his sister was receiving treatment in the hospital and was later diagnosed with hyperthyroidism in January 2022.

According to him, she was to undergo treatment for the condition when the medical workers discovered that she had a swollen heart and thereafter referred her to LUTH to see specialists for her condition.

Prince said, "So, she left Port Harcourt and came to Lagos on December 24, 2022. We called LUTH to know if their specialists were on the ground but we were told that the machine that will be used for the hyperthyroidism treatment was not working.

"The LUTH referred her to the University College Hospital, Ibadan. When we got there, a doctor said she would go through lots of treatments to bring the swollen heart down because her heart was beating very fast.

"She needed to see specialists including an endocrinologist, neurologist, and cardiologist, among others, but the doctor said UCH has the machine for the treatment but the specialists were not on the ground and that she needed to see a cardiologist to certify that her heart was in a good position for them to put her on a machine for the treatment."

The Benue State indigene said they were advised to see specialists in LUTH and take the results to the UCH for treatment, adding that that was what they were doing all through January till February 2023, when the Central Bank of Nigeria's new naira design started causing issues in the country.

He added, "To see a specialist was very expensive and because my funds were trapped in banks, it became very difficult for her to continue seeing the specialists and continuing the treatments. So, she was just taking oral drugs but the tablets were not effective, so her condition started getting worse.

"Before that, the swollen stomach and legs were going down, and she was getting better. She woke up one day and became restless; we tried to sort out funds to go to the cardiologist in LUTH, but when we got there, we were told to go to the UCH to get her admitted for doctors and specialists to treat her and monitor her condition."

Prince said Doofan was given an appointment to resume her treatment on Monday (today), adding that she was making plans to resume the treatment when she suffered a crisis and was rushed to the Epe General Hospital from where she was referred to the LUTH.

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He continued, “We got to LUTH around 2am, called the emergency number, and the security officials at the Emergency Ward started asking what the emergency was. A doctor later came out and I showed him the referral letter. He brought out his thermometer, checked her pulse and temperature, and returned inside.

“After a few minutes, he returned and told us that their beds were occupied and there was no bed space to treat her. I pleaded with him to give her first aid or something to stabilise her pending the time that there would be a bed space for proper treatment to commence.

“But he said their policy does not allow them to give treatment outside the hospital. I then begged him that he should allow me to take her inside the emergency ward and that I would sit on the floor, and carry her on my lap so he can give her first aid treatment but he still said no. She died at the front of the emergency ward while I was looking for a bench or table to place her on.”

He said the family members had commenced preparations for her sister’s burial at their home town in Benue.

Contacted, the Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee, LUTH, Prof Wasiu Adeyemo, said he was aware of the situation.

Adeyemo said, “I am aware but I do not have the details yet. When I discovered the story on the internet, I forwarded it to the Head of the Department and I am still waiting for their response.

“When we see a patient like that, what we do is to investigate; patients sometimes come and there are no bed spaces and what we do is to refer them. But for a really serious, critical emergency, we inform them immediately that there is no space and give them options of where to go.”

Adeyemo said with or without money, it was the responsibility of the hospital to treat patients in line with the policy of the Federal Government.

He added. “The population is growing, the government has been responsible, and the government is building a new hospital that will give us more space. The problem is not limited to us.

“We won’t say because it is an emergency, and then chase the people that are there away. As a policy, we have a very effective way of communicating with our patients; it is quite unfortunate that this patient died.

“In a few months, all these will be solved. We have many of our wards under renovation, and there is another building being constructed in the hospital. By the time we are done, we would have more space.”