

It's devastating losing dad, sister within three weeks – Ogun machinist

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By Temitope Adetunji

A machinist, Taiwo Sunmola, tells **TEMITOPE ADETUNJI** how he lost his 71-year-old father three weeks after the death of his elder sister and how alleged negligence on the part of some government hospitals in Lagos worsened his father's condition

Sunmola *...your dad passed on?*

My name is Taiwo Sunmola and I am 35 years old. I am from Odogbolu in Ogun State. I live in Port Harcourt, Rivers State because that is where I work. After I arrived in Lagos, I went to check on my dad, Mudashiru Sunmola, on Thursday which was August 24. I noticed he was losing sleep, and I realised that he was brooding all through the day. So, I took him to a pharmacy which also had a lab section. He was examined and consequently, a pharmacist recommended drugs that would resuscitate him.

Did his condition improve after that?

He responded to treatment until Monday (August 28) when the situation suddenly changed. We took him to a hospital that day. The Lagos State University Teaching Hospital refused to admit my dying dad because the doctors who attended to us that night probably thought my siblings and I might not be able to pay a deposit of N350,000 for their special reservations. We got to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (the fifth government hospital) at Idi-Araba, where my dad eventually gave up the ghost. LUTH also declined his admission on the same grounds as others that we had been to earlier. My dad's health crisis actually got worse at about 1pm on Monday.

Did you take him to a private hospital before he died?

Yes, I did. I took him to a private clinic where the health workers received and admitted him. They administered some medications to him, and he slept off. Initially, I felt relieved when I saw him sleeping; I thought the injections and drips were to make him relax. So, I kept observing him until he began to exhibit some reactions that were quite unusual.

What did you notice?

He was jerking and, at some point, was throwing up. I became so scared that I ran to the hospital's front desk to request the attention of the doctor on duty. He came to observe my father and said he would be fine. I called for the doctor's attention more than four times because of how bad my dad's condition was before the doctor wrote a referral note that he should be taken to the general hospital for better treatment. The general hospital in Ikorodu took the note and gave us another one, referring us to LASUTH in Ikeja. LASUTH also referred us to another facility in PWD (the Air Force Base) along Oshodi Road. They also referred us because they had no facilities to handle his case. So, we were advised to take him to Gbagada General Hospital, which also said they had no bed space.

What were your initial thoughts when the hospitals rejected your father?

I was startled. I was emotionally, mentally, and physically devastated. I felt like the whole world was crashing! On getting to LUTH in Idi-Araba, after they also declined to admit my dad, there was a kindhearted woman who we met there (at LUTH) who

also brought a patient there for a similar health crisis but was not admitted either. She saw my dad's deteriorating condition and was concerned. She approached us and advised us to take him to LASUTH in Ikeja.

On hearing that we'd been there and were declined on the ground that there was no bed space to admit him, she told us that was what her family was told initially when they got there before a so-called nurse, according to her, offered to help them get a bed space if they would be ready to make a deposit of N350,000, which she obliged, but it was a male bed space they had and her patient was female. So, my twin brother pleaded with her to call the person if we could return there. She called the person at LASUTH with my twin brother's phone, and the conversation was recorded. From the conversation, I got to know that they did have special reservations for those they felt had the capacity to pay whatever fee they demanded.

What exactly do you think was responsible for your father's ill health?

Actually, I lost my elder sister, who was his first child, on August 6 to childbirth complications. She delivered a baby girl through a caesarian section but died shortly after the child's birth. So, my siblings and I tried to keep the news away from my father, but somehow, he got to know about it.

Who told him?

I am not a resident of Lagos, so I really do not know who broke the news to him. It was that incident that compelled me to come to Lagos to see him and spend time with him, at least to see how he was coping with the development and help him absorb the shock. We tried everything we could to give him medical care and resuscitate him until his health condition worsened on Monday afternoon.

Where is your late sister's baby now?

The baby is in her father's custody.

How many are your siblings?

I have three siblings now after my elder sister passed on; my twin brother and I are now the eldest. We have two younger siblings (a male and a female).

What are their occupations?

My twin brother works with a private security company. My younger brother is self-employed and my last sibling works with a microfinance company.

How did you and your siblings cope when your father's health was declining?

Well, it was a daunting ordeal, but we engaged a clinician who examined his response to clinical treatments. Sincerely, the rejection we face at the different hospitals has changed my notions about the ungodly country in which I regrettably found myself, where the safety of life goes for an alarming price in government-owned health institutions.

At what point did you realise that your dad had passed on?

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Nobody attended to us after they had observed him and told us that they had no bed space. I kept checking his pulse intermittently until 11:35pm when I discovered that his pulse had stopped. The negligence of the hospitals killed my father.

Are you married?

I am not married but my twin brother is married.

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What do you do for a living?

I am a web printing machine operator; I work with Lukahed Properties Limited, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Is your mother alive?

I lost my mother six years ago. It always hurts my feelings to remember that my mother is no more, will not witness my wedding, and will not behold my children. And now my father is no more. I'm now an orphan because my family name is not recognised in society and because I did not have the millions required to save my father's life.

What led to your mother's death?

She was diagnosed with diabetes in 2016 and we were managing her condition medically until later in 2017 when she eventually passed on. My parents taught me to hold on to my dignity and moral values at all costs no matter what life throws at me.

Did you lodge any complaints about how the government hospital treated your father?

If I had a way to bring my ordeal to the attention of authorities in the health sectors and governments in Nigeria, I wouldn't hesitate. Prompt and necessary attention to checkmate officials in the sector is necessary. I would also plead with the government to prioritise the provision of basic amenities for the health sectors to enable them to function efficiently without any excuse or laxity.

Did you reach out to the authorities to address the issues you encountered?

No, I just felt the deed had already been done. Whatever actions they take will not return my dad to life. I wish to draw the attention of the government to the unethical and inhumane character of some workers at LASUTH, Ikeja. My ordeal has taught me that government-owned hospitals in Nigeria have become a quick flight to heaven for a dying patient who needs urgent medical attention.

Were there signs that he was going to die soon?

I can recall that any time I arrived in Lagos, I normally stayed in my father's house. Whenever he spoke, he always said, "Now that I am closer to where I am going". But I actually had a different understanding of that; I felt he was above 70 years of age and obviously could not live for another 70 years. I never knew he was speaking in a parable.

What kind of person was your dad?

My father was born in 1952 to the Sunmola family, a Muslim family; he died at 71. He was a victim of a broken home shortly after his birth. He did not enjoy the care of a mother like every other child, according to his narration. He was single-handedly raised by his father. Later, he was taken to Lagos to live with his uncle in Surulere, Lagos.

His aspirations to attain academic heights were thwarted as his uncle made him an errand boy; he hawked goods on the streets of Surulere for his uncle's wife for years until a younger sibling of his uncle angrily took him away. He took him to Ilesha, where he enrolled him for training in a printing press to learn the profession. He successfully completed his period of apprenticeship and worked with a government press briefly before his uncle (Dehinde Alfred), who was a circulation manager with the Daily Times newspapers, brought him into the print media sector in the early 1980s. Until he quit his job, he worked with several print media companies, including the Guardian, Champion, and Comet newspapers.

How close was he to his children?

My dad was a wonderful father. He always shared his experience with his children and any younger person who came his way for direction and to prevent them from making the wrong decisions in life with relevant Bible references. One of his words of counsel was, "Be good to everyone. We do not know if relatives do meet in heaven. What will you tell them about the kind of relationship you had with those they left behind when you were alive?" I just can't describe how losing my sister and father in the same month has affected me. He was a man who feared God and was also endowed with fatherly charisma. He was a peace-loving man, and he strived for peaceful coexistence with all men. Although he did not spare the rod, he always drew us to himself and let us know that rebuke and correction are not hatred and that he was only fulfilling his civic obligation as a father. He was a disciplinarian.

How close was he to your late sister?

She was dear to him. He loved her to a fault. I can recall when we were growing up; whenever my mother offended my father, he always called my elder sister to a corner and complained about things my mother did wrong. Also, most times when there was a dispute between my dad and my mum, only my late sister could pacify my dad, help them reach a compromise, and settle the disagreement.

Has he been buried?

Yes, he was buried yesterday, August 29, 2023, at Ishawo, Ikorodu Lagos, which is his residence. My relatives had been calling to express their sympathy and get updates about our plans for my father's final burial. Many who were able to make it to his funeral with the short notice came and witnessed his burial.