

FROM FRED EZEH, ABUJA

FOR Mr. and Mrs. Raphael and Agatha Nwamara, the joy of parenthood was cut short a few weeks ago when their twin babies, Ezinne and Eziche, suddenly took ill and died. It was two weeks after their birth.

Born on January 23, 2022, they died on February 10, 2022. But their death which has brought pain and anguish to their parents has now become something of a controversy between them and one of the hospitals said to have handled their case.

Make no mistake about this. Babies, including twins, do die while in their diapers for reasons nobody can explain. But the parents of these ones are accusing the hospital of mishandling their case. They, therefore, accuse them of professional negligence and irresponsibility. Based on their belief and conviction, they are asking relevant authorities, including the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the babies and the competence of the doctors and nurses who handled their case. The couples allege that the hospital, Vicar Hospital, located at Mararaba, a neighbouring town to Abuja, is filled with workers who have a poor attitude to work, and who are ignorant and incompetent. These vices, they contend, were what led to the premature death of their kids.

How sweet story turned sour

Mr. Raphael told *Saturday Sun* that they are one of the lucky few that were blessed with the fruit of the womb after their wedding. He said: "After our wedding, my wife took in, and as expected, started her ante-natal at the right time as advised by the hospital and those with necessary experiences. Not long after, necessary scans were conducted and it was discovered that she was carrying a set of twins. I was happy that I was going to be a father soon. But that joy was cut short by the incompetence and ineptitude of the health workers at Vicar Hospital."

"Actually, we had chosen two hospitals: Asokoro and a private hospital called Mayday Hospital located at Mararaba, opposite Abacha Road in a neighbouring town with Abuja, for the ante-natal. But during one of the visits to the hospital, the result of a scan conducted on my wife showed that the head of one of the babies was wrongly positioned. But the doctors assured us that the situation would be corrected."

"But in the course of the ante-natal, we were told that the babies might be born in the seventh month. They said that twins were better delivered in the seventh month. I discussed it with my wife and other experienced women around me, and they asked me to go ahead, noting that there was no problem. At the seventh month and two weeks, my wife was delivered of the babies, two girls, though, through caesarean section (CS). But it was successfully done. The babies were doing well, crying out loud when they were being born even though they were born prematurely."



THE TWINS IN THE HOSPITAL

"But shortly after their birth, doctors at Mayday Hospital said that, given the fact that the babies were born prematurely, they would need to spend some time in an incubator. But management regrettably noted that they didn't have an incubator facility. Hence they referred us to Vicar, a nearby hospital that has an incubator facility. At the hospital, we were asked to make a financial deposit of N80, 000 for the incubator services. This we did. They began to attend to the babies. Several drugs were recommended for us to get which I got. But after some days, my wife was diagnosed with Hepatitis B. The doctors said she couldn't breastfeed immediately. They said that before the babies would start taking breast milk, they had to take the haemoglobin vaccine which I bought at N90, 000."

"As days passed, the babies were getting better and stronger in the incubator. I bought several antibiotics and several other drugs as prescribed by the doctors. They started taking breast milk after one week after they got better and stronger. At a point, the nurses said the digestive system of one of the girls was not working well anymore, hence they began to lose weight. Meanwhile, their weight at birth was 1.6 & 1.4 kilogramme, which was fine and okay for a baby born in the seventh month. I was reliably informed by experienced persons that a baby born prematurely has to lose weight before gaining new weight, and would also exhibit some changes until the nine-month cycle is completed."

Fractured joy

► Twin babies' death triggers fight between couple, hospital

BCG vaccine and referral to a hospital

"One day, the doctor came and said that the children were two weeks old, and had to be given BCG vaccine. But from the moment the vaccine was administered to them, they changed and began to vomit and purge endlessly. They stopped crying too. We were surprised and shocked by the development. We began to ask questions but received unsatisfactory answers. However, the doctors assured us that the babies would be fine, that they were just reacting to the BCG vaccine. But their condition kept deteriorating and causing many worries to us. Gradually, they stopped crying and began to lose breath. Few days after their condition started to deteriorate, the hospital management asked us to take them to the National Hospital or somewhere else. The situation had gone beyond what they could manage."

"I sought the help of my sister and some friends. Together, they rushed the babies to Limi Children Hospital, Abuja. At Limi, we were asked to deposit N2 million before they could be attended to. This we did and

situation of the babies leading to their sudden death."

Though she was full of pity for the parents of the twins, especially given the trauma they had been through, she was, however quick to note that because the babies were premature ones, anything could happen when dealing with their case. Their condition could change at any time, she explained.

She said: "Let me first correct the wrong impression that the babies died in my hospital. That is not correct. And we never mismanaged their health situation. Rather, we managed their case professionally until it got to a point where we felt we couldn't continue because one of the babies was not responding to feeding. So, we were left with the only option of referring them to a higher hospital so they could get superior medical attention."

"At the point of referral, one of the twins had no complaint whatsoever and was feeding fine, growing and developing as expected. The second one was having issues feeding. We observed them closely until the need arose for them to get higher medical attention. The claim that the death of these babies was as a result of the BCG vaccine given to them is not correct. For instance, there was no reaction from them on the first, second and third days after the administration of the vaccine. So, it's not right to say that the BCG vaccine was responsible for their death. Whoever claimed that vaccine or other procedures they took was responsible for the deterioration of their health and eventual death should come with evidence."

the treatment by paediatricians began. The doctors said the situation had deteriorated, and faulted the decision of the previous hospital to give BCG vaccine to the children considering the fact that they were premature and also their weight. After 24 hours, the two children died: one in the morning, the other in the evening, the same day. It was a devastating and horrible experience for me and my wife. These children lived for just two weeks and one day. Doctors at Limi Children's Hospital, in their report, said the children's lungs and other digestive systems failed, perhaps, due to the BCG vaccine that was given to them when they were not yet due for it. Before then, their feeding was moving from one meal to three, meaning that they were developing well and fast."

Vicar Hospital reacts

But the Vicar Hospital does not agree with the couple and their allegations. Medical Director of the hospital, Dr Caroline Ani, in her reaction disagreed with the position of Mr Raphael Nwamara on the issue of the hospital mismanaging the health