

In Abuja, pregnant woman, 2 infants die in general hospital over doctors' absence

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From **Fred Itua**, Abuja

The Kuje General Hospital located in one of the satellite towns of Abuja, on Saturday assumed the semblance of a graveyard as a pregnant woman in labour and two mildly-ill infants lost their lives, following the complete absence of doctors to attend to their medical emergencies.

Patients at the hospital were left to their own devices to either seek help at private hospitals whose services are at cut-throat prices or remain there hoping to see a doctor come to their aid.

The hospital which is supposed to commence clinical services at 8am was filled with patients and their relations before 8 o'clock. However, as at 4pm when our correspondent arrived at the hospital, there was no doctor on ground to attend to them, except an already exhausted doctor on call who was visibly overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges before him.

Patients who had been waiting since 7am, and were given numbers preparatory to seeing the doctor on call said a mildly-ill child of about 22 months died around 11 am at the emergency unit while the doctor was away.

An eyewitness account revealed that by the time the doctor on call arrived at the emergency room to attend to the child, it was already too late.

At the maternity ward, an unnamed woman in labour also died with her pregnancy due to the absence of doctors to perform a cesarean section on her in time.

Asked why he left his duty post despite the presence of many patients needing medical care, the doctor (name withheld) said he needed to go and get food, and that he had been working for more than 24 hours and therefore needed some rest.

Other eyewitnesses, though not happy with the situation, expressed sympathy for the doctor who they said had been the only one attending to patients in all the wards and units since Friday night.

"Let us all have pity on the doctor because he's also a human being. He has been the only one attending to patients and nobody to assist him. He could break down as well, and who will treat him when that happens," a woman whose child is on admission said.

A certain official (name withheld) was said to have been the one in charge of the maternity ward, and who should have handled the pregnant woman's case, but was nowhere to be found within the hospital.

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The second in command at the hospital, has been alleged to be the person responsible for the situation due to her unfair distribution of duties to the doctors.

The doctor is said to be the one in charge of preparing rosters for doctors but allegedly confers undue advantage on some doctors who are either considered as her people at the expense of others.

Sources alleged that another certain doctor is one of the beneficiaries of the favoritism as she may allegedly not even come to work for many days and weeks. They alleged that her shifts are usually added to others who end up being over-worked as they can run a 72-hour shift nonstop.

The doctor is also alleged to be absent most times as administrative issues requiring her attention are usually handled on phone, a situation which sources said often leaves pressing issues unresolved.

Another factor is the inadequacy of doctors at the hospital as sources disclosed that there's been no new hand added to the manpower in the last five years even though staff have either died or retired.

Unconfirmed report also revealed that the FCT Health and Human Services Secretariat which is responsible for employing doctors and deploys them to general hospitals across the Territory, has not carried out employment of medical doctors and other health personnel in the last five years.

Cases of doctors being overworked to the point of breaking down while on duty are said to be rampant in Kuje general hospital and across all government-owned hospitals in the FCT.

A brilliant doctor was said to have slumped and died while carrying out surgery on a patient in the theater.

Another was said to have complained of a headache, only to go home and never woke up from his sleep. He was later found to be hypertensive, and had died from exhaustion and stress.

The Chief Medical Director of the hospital Dr. Babatunde Ayeni, told Daily Sun that only two infants died. He did not deny other claims about negligence.