

Controversy over death at maternity home

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In Nigeria, healthcare delivery system has been in poor shape for many years, resulting in avoidable high rate of infant and maternal mortality, particularly in the villages. REGINA OTOKPA reports on a recent case of needless death of a woman, while giving life

A 25-year-old woman, Mrs Ruth Okafor, has been reported dead as a result of heavy bleeding, after delivery in a maternity home.

The poorly equipped facility is run by a nurse with the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps' (NSCDC) Training College Hospital in Sauka, along Airport Road, Abuja. Ruth, an indigene of Anambra State, died on Monday, November 27, 2017, shortly after giving birth to a baby girl in the maternity home located in Nuwalege community.

The deceased, who had her first delivery (a boy) through caesarean session (CS) in 2015, had been told by doctors and nurses after registering for antenatal at the Kuje General Hospital, Abuja that her second delivery would also be through Caesarean section.

Apart from the Kuje Hospital which could be about 20 kilometres from her Nuwalege residence, there are Nigerian Air Force Base Hospital and the NSCDC hospital, which are both about a kilometre respectively to the nurse's maternity home. Ruth, who until her death, was a hairdresser, began to bleed profusely after delivery, and was placed on a drip by Grace, who failed to refer her to a facility that could manage her condition until she died.

According to her husband, Mr. Chibuike Okafor, his late wife, who refused to disclose the information to him, insisted she must deliver her child at the NSCDC nurse's home, about 150 metres from her house with the hope her delivery would be natural. Recounting what happened, the 35-year old dealer in air conditioning products, who married his wife

in 2013, said: “Last Wednesday, I took my wife to Kuje General hospital because she said she was weak and was always vomiting. I told the doctor to check my wife very well because I didn’t know what was happening.

The doctor said it was labour.

They asked me to stay outside while they conduct check on her. She didn’t tell me that doctor told her she would put to bed through operation.

“When we got home, she said she would go to this woman’s house to deliver. I resisted and said she should go to Kuje General Hospital, where there would be attended to by skilled personnel with quality equipment to help her deliver. She insisted she would go to this woman’s house.

“My wife put to bed at 1.a.m. I asked her if she was okay and she said there was no problem. I came back home and lay on the bed with my little son, with the hope my wife and my baby, a girl, would be discharged later that day. After three hours, someone came to my house and started knocking that I should come that something was happening.

“I went there and saw the nurse giving my wife drip, and blood was gushing out. I said madam, what are you going to do? She said I should not worry that everything would be fine. I looked at my wife bleeding and her eyes were changing as if she was about to die. She was shaking. I said madam, wait, let me go and look for motor and take my wife to the hospital. I called my neighbour, who has a car. He brought the car and we took my wife to Kuje General Hospital. My wife died five minutes after we got there.

“Then, a nurse, who earlier attended to her at the hospital when I took her there last week, said did I not tell your wife to come and do operation to deliver her baby? I replied the nurse that she didn’t tell me anything. From there, they took my wife to Wuse General Hospital to put her in the mortuary. And I went to give my new born baby to my friend’s wife to look after for me.”

However, the nurse, Grace Momoh, who claimed she could take delivery at home as a nurse, insisted that although the deceased gave birth at about 1 a.m, she did not die under her roof, but she (Grace) further noted that “this is the first time a mother would die in my care since I came to the village in 2012.” “She didn’t die here.

She was referred. It was at the hospital she died. I am a nurse and I am a social worker. It is general nursing. We learnt everything in school. “This is the first person. I don’t know the circumstances behind her death because issues of bleeding, God has helped us severally to control.

If you are into this profession, you meet cases. There are some you cannot do. You send them away immediately. And there are some you can do with the help of God, not even by our power. So, cases of bleeding, God has helped us severally to control many to bring them under control and stop.

“Even after her own, someone has given birth here this morning. I was telling my pastor this evening when we closed, if it is issue of delivery, it is not by power. I know I learnt a little of it from school, but I know God specially gave me the gift. God has helped me to deliver so many women from where I was staying before in Gwagwalada to this place where

I'm staying. God has helped me," she boasted. Momoh added that, "there are many nurses in this Nuwalege that are conducting delivery in the house. It is just unfortunate that this one happened.

And only God knows the source. But, humanly speaking, I tried my best as an experienced nurse. I tried my best with prayers and all I could do."

According to her sister, who helps her take delivery in the house, Momoh has taken delivery of about 95 per cent of the women in Nuwalege community delivering their children in the bungalow where the incident occurred. She questioned why her sister was coming under undue heat, saying, "Had this case happened in the hospital, if you want to assume there is no hospital in Nuwalege because she put to bed in this house, who will I go and arrest, a doctor or who? "95 per cent of women in the village put to bed in this house. She often helps them.

Some put to bed; they don't have money to pay. Even me, I have witnessed many of these here. If you people should come and ask any question, you should think twice. Is it because this one is in the house here?" she queried.