

Agony of Accident Victims in Kogi

The high rate of road accidents in Lokoja is worrisome even as there are no facilities to treat survivors. This cost THISDAY two members of staff last week, Shola Oyeyipo writes

The road accident involving two staff members of THISDAY Newspapers – Kazeem Popoola and Oluwaseun Samuel – on Thursday, June 20, 2012, exposed the unreliable medical care in Kogi State to take care of victims of accidents, which has resulted in unwanted loss of lives. Though Popoola had died on the spot of the accident, Samuel was able to make it to the General Hospital, Okene alive but he eventually died that night at the Lokoja Specialist Hospital due to inadequate medical care.

According to the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) source and an eyewitness account, the 911 truck lost control after its front tyre burst when it was descending from a sloppy road, about 10 kilometres to Okene - along Kabba - Okene road. Samuel, who was on the wheel reportedly manoeuvred the vehicle with the hope of managing the crisis but they were unlucky and they eventually fell into the ditch where Popoola died. They were going to Abuja on official duty when the accident happened.

The accident occurred at about 1pm but kudos must go to the FRSC for their rescue effort. Officers and men of the commission arrived the scene promptly. They descended into the ditch, axed the badly damaged vehicle and brought out the occupants. Samuel was badly injured.

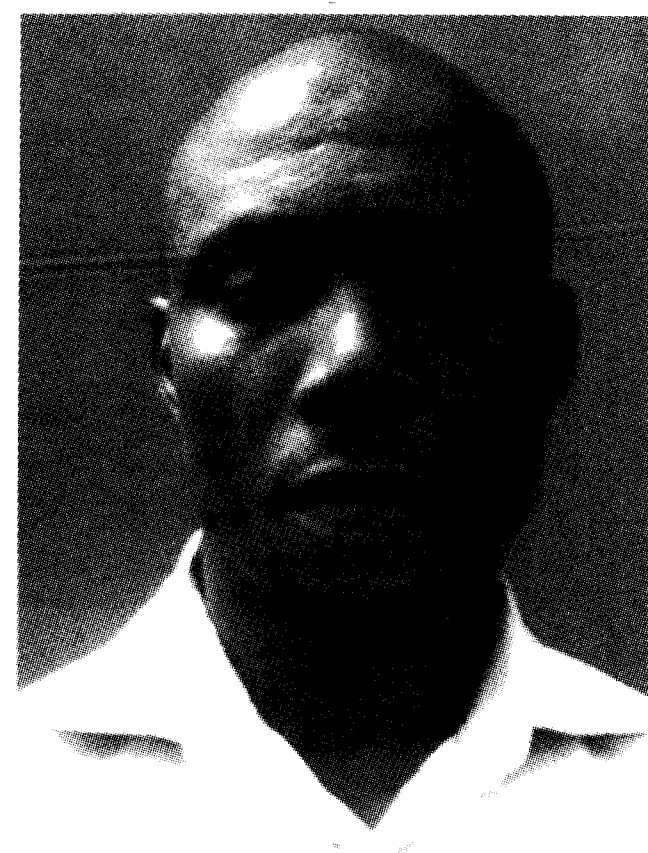
The body of his dead co-traveller was deposited in a mortuary at the General Hospital, Okenwen - near Okene but the beginning of what led to Samuel's death that night at about 11: 37pm was that he was dropped at the General Hospital Okene in the first place. When an official of THISDAY arrived at the hospital at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, nothing had been done to the injured survivor. Even the stitches on his cuts were done unprofessionally. And though he had a total fracture on the lower part of his right leg, no X-ray had been done to examine the gravity of the damage on the leg and other parts of his body. He was laid on a bed on the floor in an unkempt hospital ward where those on admission were staring at him. He groaned in agony. A male nurse and two student nurses; a boy and a girl were attending to Samuel who at that time needed urgent examination by qualified doctors. If he got that he could have survived the accident.

The situation at the Okene General Hospital was not just so because the nurses would not want to attend to patients properly but because it is inadequately equipped, understaffed and doctors were not on hand to take care of the accident victim. A lot of precious time was lost at the hospital with nothing concrete being done to help the badly injured accident victim.

The nurse on duty said: "We are under-staffed". He agreed to the idea of moving him to a better hospital as fast as



Popoola



Samuel

possible. They were helpless since there were no needed equipment and manpower required to put the hospital to use for saving lives.

In fact, a resident around the hospital who confided in THISDAY said: "It is better that you quickly move him away. The doctors don't come to work more than twice in a week. If anyone of them comes thrice in a week such one has really tried".

Against this background, Samuel was moved to the Lokoja Specialist Hospital. While leaving, even on request, the Okene General Hospital did not present any document to indicate the treatment already administered and specify their observation, which would have helped those at the other end to commence treatment. So, an ambulance was arranged - the exorbitant bill was quickly paid. Such bills may not be affordable to a number of Nigerians within days of an accident. When the ambulance arrived at Lokoja and parked at the entrance of the Accident and Emergency Unit of the state-owned Specialist Hospital, contrary to expectation, a saucy pregnant female doctor asked: "Hope he doesn't have head injury". Her lackadaisical attitude sparked hot argument between her and victim's colleagues who were looking forward to proper medical care for the dying young man. The argument was that she should have examined him properly and given appropriate recommendation based on her expert observation.

She explained that the question was predicated on the ground that the hospital lacked facilities to treat head injuries. The irritable manner with which the message was conveyed did not signify that she had human feeling, especially to a dying

man who was showing the need for urgent medical care by the way he breathed heavily.

When the victim's colleague with the assistance of the driver and the medical personnel that came with the ambulance brought him down, no concrete test was carried out and no x-ray was conducted on him. They said he needed x-ray but the official in charge was not around. The doctors examined him scantily. They administered an injection on him. Shortly after, less than an hour after the injection, he died.

Aside the natural pain of losing loved ones, his death was a great shock to those that brought him into the hospital because as at that time, there were assurances that he was going to get expert attention. It was ironical when the female doctor called those that went to get food for the accident victim that his condition was deteriorating and that he needed oxygen and it was not available. It was decided that he should be taken to the Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja, but the ambulance driver was nowhere to be found. As at then, his condition was getting worse. It was therefore decided that he should be conveyed in a Hilux truck but as the driver made to position the car, Samuel took his last breath. He had done his best to survive. Despite the fatality of the accident and the degree of his injuries, he prayed and waited enough for proper medical care but he never got it.

A number of accident victims must have died in this manner, especially along Auchi-Okene-Lokoja-Abuja road where accident rate is on the high side. When these road mishaps occur as they do often, the surviving victims are left to die slowly just like Samuel owing to lack of adequate medical care.