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Most Painful Deaths

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Nigerians continue to lose their lives unnecessarily because of the need for a police report as a prerequisite for the treatment of emergency victims, writes Adebisi Adedapo

The popular perception is that emergency victims are required to obtain a police report or secure presence of security personnel as a precondition for acceptance into medical facilities for treatment.

Due to this misconception, citizens who run into emergency situations often ignore victims for fear of going through the rigorous steps.

Mr. Amos Bitrus, a 35-year-old Abuja trader who hails from Kaduna State expressed reservation on the possibility of rendering assistance to emergency victims. "I may not assist a distressed person or emergency victim, I will not be willing to answer questions from the hospital or even the police. Before they admit a patient, so many questions will be asked which I may not be able to answer."

Another respondent, Mr. Obiano Stanley from Anambra state said; "It depends on the level of injury and condition of the victim, if I suspect that the victim may die in the process of trying to render help, I will immediately leave the scene, I don't want to be fingered and a culprit."

Meanwhile, sources from the Nigerian Police Force headquarters and hospital authorities have cleared the air regarding the misconception. While awaiting the communiqué from a three-day inter-agency peace building and development program for security agencies, civil societies, the media and other stakeholders organised by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) with the support from the UNDP, a practical situation of some of the major concerns raised at the meeting presented itself.

The stakeholders engagement held in Abuja between 14th and 16th July had amongst other issues, highlighted the danger of compelling victims of emergency cases, some even with life threatening injuries to produce a police report before such a victim could get medical help.

Also, the stakeholders decried the lack of an effective emergency number to be contacted for prompt response in a distress situation.

Participants at the meeting were drawn from the Armed Forces, NPF, NSI, NCS, NSCDC, FRSC, NEMA, EFCC, ICPC, DSS, NPS, NOA, FFS, NIA, IPCR, NBA, Centre for Crisis Communication, National Planning Commission, Peace scholars, National Human Rights Commission, CSOs and the media.

While the discussions were ongoing, I recalled the story of Anthony Mbadigwe, an unfortunate student who lost his life to stab wounds in the year 2006.

Mbadigwe, a 200 level student in the Faculty of Law in the University of Abuja was attacked by armed robbers behind the university's male hostel around 9pm and sustained stab wounds near his chest. When Tony was hurried to the university's clinic, staff at the clinic immediately referred him to a nearby hospital without administering even a first aid treatment.

As usual, the hospital authority at St. Mary Catholic Hospital Gwagwalada requested for a police report, and as luck would run out on the poor man, the police officers on duty at the Gwagwalada Police station were asked numerous questions, some of which Tony rescuers could not answer. Efforts to obtain police report to enable Mbadigwe receive medical help proved abortive and as he was being returned to the hospital to plead for help, the promising lawyer lost his life on the way.

Despite the outrage and students demonstration generated by Mbadigwe's death and the unfortunate demise others in similar circumstance, the situation may not have improved, as some hospital authorities, rightly or wrongly still insist on police report before commencing treatment.

A similar situation appeared in the early hours of Monday 20th July, when a 28 years old Olajide Abodunrin, in company of three other friends; Adio Afolabi (30 years) Gbenga Owoeye (34 years) and one Babajide (age unknown) were involved in a ghastly car crash with a bullet proofed Toyota Camry 2013 model saloon car, belonging to Abodunrin.

The unfortunate incident could have been aided by a pool of water flowing on the major streets of Maitama, owing to blocked drainages. The pool usually stops by the valley of a bridge just about 10 meters away from the Maitama Hospital whenever there is a heavy downpour.

It was gathered that the flowing water was so much that it disrupted flow of traffic the previous day (Sunday) forcing commuters to ply a one-way in order to avoid being stuck in the water.

At about 4:15am Monday morning, this Reporter was returning from a nearby filling station, which operate 24 hours, when a certain young man flagged down his vehicle and screamed for assistance. On getting to the scene, two lives seemed to have been lost (without medical examination), while two others who were severely injured could not be rescued immediately as the vehicle doors were locked and the glasses uneasy to penetrate.

The accident had occurred about one hour earlier, and sympathisers who gathered at the scene, including security personnel from the hospital and bar attendants from a garden sharing boundary with the hospital, explained that a police patrol vehicle had ignored their cry for help, after observing the situation from a distance without even coming down from the police van.

However another police Hilux vehicle with two men who were not on patrol duty stopped to offer assistance, few minutes later, one of the doors was forced open, the men managed to evacuate one of the sobbing survivors, while the other had his body hooked and could not be rescued until about 6:20am, when officials of NEMA finally arrived at the scene.

The first victim to be rescued was however not immediately taken to the hospital for medical support, despite that the scene was a stone-throw from the Maitama hospital.

A cab driver who was also returning from the filling station had refused to convey the rescued victim without the company of a security personnel, while the police men waited for over 30 minutes until efforts to evacuate the second person proved abortive. The excuse was simple, the policemen wanted to stand as witness for both living victims at the same time.

The policemen eventually took the first rescue to the hospital and left, while hospital authorities alerted the Maitama division police station of the development as the policemen couldn't be traced.

When eventually, the NEMA officials who could not be prompt at the scene for logistic reasons arrived with a Rapid Intervention Vehicle (RID) the second survivor who had been helpless for over 3hours was rescued, and bodies of the late Abodunrin and Adio taken to the hospital where they were certified dead and deposited at the hospital morgue.

According to an eye witness account, Abodunrin's vehicle ran into the flood and lost control.

Abodunrin who was the supervisor of a Forte Oil filling station in Maitama and his friends were reportedly returning from a famous night club in Wuse II area of the city, they stopped-by at the filling station to refill and to eat at an Indomie spot before heading for an undisclosed hotel.

A familiar source at the scene said; "We were together at the club and we all went to eat Indomie, Jide and one of his friends who just returned from the USA (Adio) and two other people, one of them was my schoolmate at the University of Ilorin. They were four inside the car. The fifth person who came with them to the club is 'KB' but they left him in annoyance, because he followed a lady whom he met at the club to her car."

"I was driving behind the vehicle but I couldn't meet-up due to Jide's high speed, he must have ran into the water with that speed and lost control." It was also gathered that Adio, who recently returned from the USA was an asthmatic patient, he did not sustain severe injury and could have been rescued alive if there was a prompt medical help.

Meanwhile, a NEMA official who was part of the rescue operation explained that his team was involved in another rescue operation at the time the emergency call was received; "There are four functioning RIVs stationed at different locations in Abuja, two others have been prepared, waiting to be commissioned. We were performing another rescue operation when we got the information, so we couldn't respond promptly as expected."

Spokesperson of the National Hospital in Abuja, Dr. Tayo Haastrup, while stating position of the hospital management on the issue explained that there was no basis whatsoever to reject any patient.

According to Haastrup, the National Hospital in particular does not reject any patient no matter the cause of degree of injury sustained.

“It is not an issue for us at the National Hospital, we access any patient that comes into the hospital, and if we sense any suspicion in the course of our treatment, we find a way of alerting the police through our own security, suspected patient cannot be released except to the police for investigations. Our primary responsibility is to save lives and every other consideration comes after,” Haastrup said.

Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Police Force, Emmanuel Ojuckwu corroborated Haastrups position; “When a patient is taken to any hospital, the doctor is duty-bound to treat the patient and help save such live in accordance with his oath of office. The doctor doesn’t need to wait for a police report or presence of the police before carrying out the duty. The police can be notified after such victim has been stabilised,” Ojukwu said.

It is however disheartening that some medical facilities, notably privately owned hospitals, uninformed security personnel and the general public misconstrue this position and consider the police report as the first step of a rescue exercise.

It is also unimaginable that a national emergency telephone line is not effective, except the usual 11 digits telephone number provided by NEMA, which may not be easily remembered in a distressed situation.

In view of this, a legal framework for effective crisis and emergency management, as recommended by the stakeholders engagement should be established, and government should provide an effective platform for state and non-state actors for effective crisis and emergency management.

The communiqué also recommended that regular joint training/operation amongst the stakeholders should be encouraged.

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