

# 'Doctors' as Murderers: The Story of Citizen Emmanuel Atsar

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*Doctors*

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The atmosphere was chaotic. The fear, tension and apprehension were almost palpable. The people that brought him to the emergency ward solicited sympathetic assistance from every one that paraded the ward wearing overcoat. Every one of them asked for money to open file, get hospital card or do the medically needful. In the labyrinth of this confusion, this badly "accidented" body had lain in one corner unattended to; while medical merchandising went on and commercial trade-offs were negotiated. By the time we checked, he had lain helpless for nine hours bleeding internally; going in and out of coma. To attend to him, the doctors had asked for a deposit of N150, 000.00; and an accompanying undertaken by a relation of the patient that the medical bill has chances of being met. And when finally their demand was met,

a commercially-motivated doctor cut open the head to drain blood, in the stead of incision to drain blood. And so, Emma died.

The story of Citizen Emmanuel Israel Atsar is replicated across Nigeria medical space, the story of "money na hand, back na ground".

Emma, as his family and friends called him, was a Youth Corps member doing his primary assignment in Owerri, Imo State and was due to complete his National Service in September, 2016. The story had it that he took some days off to visit his family in Abuja. In a trip from the bank where he had gone to withdraw some money, he was knocked down by a tricycle, popularly known as Keke Napep and was said to have sustained serious head injury.

Emma was rushed to the Gwagwalada Teaching Hospital by fellow citizens and that's where the story of Emma and the stories of many poor citizens of this country change. From here on, the story developed many branches, depending on who is telling it. The constant in all the stories however was the action or lack of it by the doctors and nurses at the Gwagwalada Teaching Hospital who left him unattended to, for over eight hours because there was no relative to sign for him and make a deposit before he could be treated.

Eye witness accounts recalled Emma's struggles to stay alive, his will to live, but no doctor or nurse came to his aid because there was no family member to make a deposit before he could be treated. Emma bled to death, literally and figuratively. The only assistance the doctors could offer Emmanuel was to tie his legs to restrain him from struggling and further constituting a nuisance, according to the accounts of the events by some patients.

Good Samaritans finally opened Emma's phone to get the number of a relative, and on the arrival of a relative, who promptly made N150, 000 deposit before they could touch Emma, the doctors, instead of a minor incision to drain the blood in his brain, had to cut open the head and left him to die.

And the question that now begs for an answer is: Do doctors still have to take the Hippocratic Oath? The oat was taught not only in medical schools but also in social studies and history classes in primary and secondary schools across the country.

For those who may have forgotten, the oat is reproduced here for ease of reference: "I swear by Apollo the physician, by Aesculapius, Hygeia, and Panacea, and I take to witness all the gods, all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment the following oath: To consider dear to me as my parents him who taught me this art; to live in common with him and if necessary to share my goods with him; to look upon his children as my own brothers, to teach them this art if they so desire without fee or written promise; to impart to my sons and the sons of the master who taught me and the disciples who have enrolled themselves and have agreed to the rules of the profession, but to these alone, the precepts and the instruction.

"I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone. To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug, nor give advice

which may cause his death. Nor will I give a woman a pessary to procure abortion. But I will preserve the purity of my life and my art. I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners (specialists in this art).

"In every house where I come I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing and all seduction, and especially from the pleasures of love with women or with men, be they free or slaves. All that may come to my knowledge in the exercise of my profession or outside of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal. If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice my art, respected by all men and in all times; but if I swerve from it or violate it, may the reverse be my lot." We need not say more.

Other questions that beg for answers are: Do we really have a National Health Policy and if we do, what does it say about treatment of accident victims in particular and care for indigent patients in general? Who is the sector regulator? Are the hospitals and doctors allowed to pick and chose who to treat and who to let die based on the brand of car that brought them to the Emergency Room?

The story of Citizen Emmanuel Israel Atsar must stimulate debates on how citizens are treated in this country by healthcare professionals especial in government health institutions.

The story of Citizen Emmanuel Israel Atsar was made more pathetic because he was a tree that made a forest, the sole bread winner in his immediate and extended family. He started as a driver but was challenged to go back to school, a challenge he willingly accepted. He later recalled that the happiest moment in his life was the day he presented his Higher National Diploma (HND) to his boss and that was also the proudest moment of his boss and indeed to all his friends and relatives.

Emma left behind a wife and two little children, aged mother and brothers and sisters to whom he is the sole bread winner. May the soul of Citizen Emmanuel Israel Atsar and the souls of all the faithful departed rest with the Lord.

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