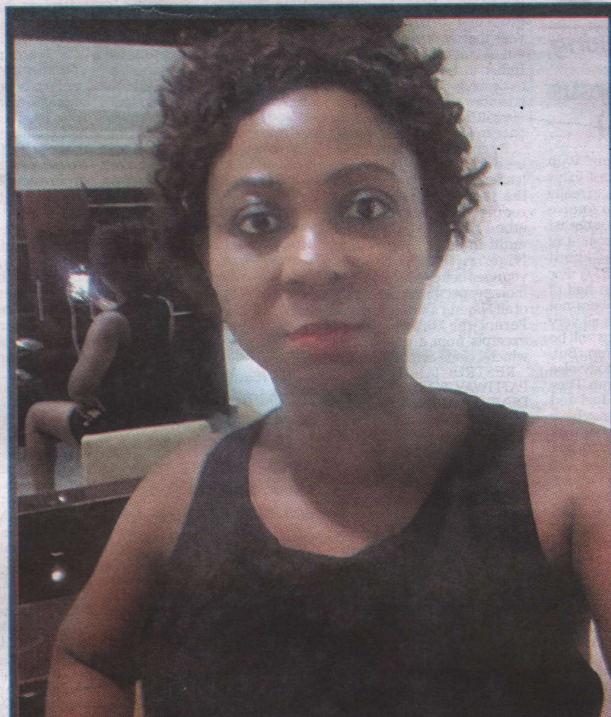


By Yinka Ajayi

Doctors at a hospital in Coker area of Ogba, Agege, Lagos are in the eye of the storm after a 32-year-old lady, identified as Mercy Ekong, allegedly died in mysterious circumstances during an operation. It was learnt that the doctors were trying to clear the lady's fallopian tube to aid her getting pregnant when she died. A source close to the hospital blamed the death on overdose of anesthesia. The death sparked trouble in the area as some youths protested the alleged poor handling of Mercy's case which led to her demise. The youths threatened to burn the hospital. Police at Pen Cinema Police Station, where the incident was said to have been reported, it was learnt, are investigating the case while the corpse of the deceased is lying in the morgue in a hospital awaiting autopsy. Meanwhile some persons close to the victim say they suspect foul play as doctors in the hospital delayed in reporting the death to the lady's family even when they had Mercy's handset with them which they could have used to contact them (family) as well as her home address in the hospital file. A doctor in the hospital, who spoke anonymously to Sunday Vanguard, said a minor operation was carried out on the deceased, saying only an autopsy could establish the cause of death. One of the victim's friends wondered why she was desperate to be pregnant as to resort to the operation when she had yet to be married. But a neighbor said she was aware that that lady only recently started dating a man who promised to marry her only if she should be pregnant, and that it may have been in the process of meeting the condition of the fiancé that she found that her blocked fallopian tube could inhibit pregnancy, and hence needed to be cleared. "Mercy told me in confidence that the man promised to marry her if she could prove that she was capable of giving him at least one child. Before then, she had had disappointment several times with men", the neighbor said. Efforts by our correspondent to trace the said fiancé proved abortive.

The friend, who refused to be identified, narrated, "Mercy, as we have been told because she didn't tell anybody before she went for the operation, had a minor surgery on her blocked fallopian tube. Apparently she wanted to be able to get pregnant even when she was not yet married. We were informed that she died during the early hours of the day and the hospital had to switch off her phone, waited till late in the night to switch on the phone to receive calls. They had her home address in the hospital file and they could not even try to locate the place to brief her people. And they lied that she was able to walk after the operation whereas the information we have indicated that the overdose of anesthesia they administered on her prior to the operation killed her. One of the doctors in the clinic said when they administered the anesthesia, they were not aware that it was an overdose. The doctors who performed the operation are probably not qualified to carry out that kind of surgery."

Saying Mercy was part of the residents who protested against poor power supply to the area last week, the friend went on: "It was after the protest that she left for the operation in the hospital. She didn't tell anybody about it. If she had told someone, she probably would have been better advised that the hospital was not the best place to unblock fallopian tube because it requires a specialist to do and I believe that specialist is a gynecologist.



AS FIANCE INSISTS ON PREGNANCY BEFORE MARRIAGE...

Mercy, 32, dies during operation by doctors to make her pregnant

About a week before her demise, she was crying profusely and when anyone asked her what the problem was, she would not say anything. But I always saw her with a file which I believed was a hospital file. One thing she had kept telling me for years was that she desired to her own biological child. But I always laughed it off that 'you are not married, why the strong desire for a child?'

"She told me that she once had abortion in secondary school and that, since then, she had been unable to get pregnant. We always encouraged her not to worry as God will do it."

Speaking on how the news of her friend's death was broken to her, she stated, "One of our neighbors asked me if I heard she had died. In shock I asked, 'which Mercy?' And she said, 'Your best friend.' I had to call her phone number around 8 o'clock that night but the line was switched off. I called later and the line went through and a man picked it. I told him I wanted to speak to the owner of the phone. He asked me who I was to her and I told him that

Mercy told me in confidence that the man promised to marry her if she could prove that she was capable of giving him at least one child

she was my friend and I that I had not heard from her all day. He told me she had died. I asked if she had an accident and the man said she came to do a minor medical surgery. I immediately called two of our mutual friends and we headed to the hospital. On getting there, the doctor we met told us to calm down. He told us that Mercy came to

do an operation to unblock her fallopian tube. I inquired about the time of death and he said it was 4 o'clock only to say later that it was 2 o'clock. The doctor also said he was not the one who did the operation. He demanded I sign a document so that she could be taken to the mortuary. I asked about the person who signed for her to be operated and that if was the deceased herself who did, he should cause her to stand and sign the document for her to be taken to the mortuary. Before we even got there, they already had an ambulance in place to convey her to the mortuary without the family's consent. Mercy, being a single lady, lived alone and we hardly knew her close relations. But after her death, some of her close relatives came. Her mother just died and Mercy and her siblings were making burial arrangements before she too died suddenly."

Also speaking to Sunday Vanguard, one of the community leaders in Ogba, who chose to be anonymous, said: "It's unfortunate that she cannot come back to explain the cause of her death. As close as we were to her, she did open up to us that she had any health challenge. I was told the management of the hospital invited the police into the case immediately the incident occurred. I had to calm irate youths protesting the death. I was later told that a female police officer, one Inspector Margaret, came from the Pen Cinema Police Station in connection with the death. The family of the deceased lady came around the next day and the police also came to search her room. We have not been briefed on the police findings. Mercy was very loving and accommodating and that is the reason youths in the area were angry about the circumstances surrounding her demise."

The landlady of the house in which Mercy lived described her deceased tenant as easy going and someone who hardly quarreled with neighbors. "Mercy may go out for two or three days but being her landlady did not give me the license to dig into her personal affair or where in particular she was going but she will always inform me anytime she was going out", the landlady said.

Autopsy

When Sunday Vanguard visited the hospital where the victim passed on, the doctor who attended to our correspondent said only an autopsy could reveal the cause of death. His words: "Ultimately the only thing that will reveal what killed her is an autopsy; we try to take care of people's health challenges but we are not God. In cases like this, people are bound to be influenced by emotions and sentiments but that doesn't mean whatever they say is professionally correct. Having said that, based on the confidentiality of my job, I have sworn to an oath and I am not permitted to reveal whatever happened whether she's alive or dead to the public. All I can say is that she came for a minor surgery and something went wrong along the line which led to her death. We actually tried to get in touch with her friends and family and most of the people we called did not answer their phones. None of the friends or family members came to the hospital until the next day. If we had not taken her to the mortuary until the next day, her body would have decomposed and that will have worsened the matter. Her relations have gone to see her corpse in the mortuary and the police have commenced investigation into the cause of death. I personally took her brother and sister to the mortuary. When such things happen, people speculate but the only way to be factual is to do autopsy which is on going through a coroner inquest.