

Overwork: How RSUTH doctor slumped, died on duty



- We're losing doctors to burnout, brain drain—NARD President**
- Death heartbreaking, unacceptable—NMA**

By Chioma Obinna

Nigerian doctors are mourning yet another avoidable tragedy. This time, the death of Dr. Oluwafemi Rotifa, a young resident doctor at Rivers State University Teaching Hospital, RSUTH, who reportedly collapsed and died after a gruelling 72-hour call duty

Vanguard gathered that the late doctor, fondly called Femoski by colleagues, was a former President of the Port Harcourt University Medical Students' Association, PUMSA, and was registered with the United Kingdom's General Medical Council, awaiting placement abroad.

According to eyewitness accounts, Rotifa had been on continuous call duty for three days in the Emergency Room before retreating to the call room to rest.

It was there that he slumped and later died, despite efforts to resuscitate him in the Intensive Care Unit.

Confirming the development to Vanguard, the President of the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors, NARD, Dr. Tope Osundara, described the incident as both preventable and a damning reflection of Nigeria's collapsing health system.

“What happened is that he was on call in the Emergency Room. Afterward, he went to the call room to rest, and it was there that he died. Unfortunately, he was the only one attending to the patients.

“The overuse of manpower strained his health and led to this painful death. It was a death on duty,” Osundara lamented.

He called on government to urgently support the family of the deceased and overhaul the system that continues to push doctors to exhaustion.

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“The burnout among medical doctors, especially resident doctors who are manning most of the teaching hospitals, is becoming very worrisome.

“We have cried out repeatedly. The few doctors left in this country are overworked, underpaid and poorly motivated.

“Government must look into remuneration and ensure immediate replacement of doctors who resign or emigrate.

Otherwise, this cycle of needless deaths will continue,” he added.

He said Nigeria's health sector has in recent years been hit by a massive brain drain, with thousands of doctors leaving for better opportunities abroad, adding that those who remain are stretched thin, often forced to cover double or triple shifts without rest.

Osundara warned that the consequences extend beyond doctors themselves.

"We are not asking for these reforms just for our own welfare, but for the patients. When a doctor is mentally, physically and emotionally broken, he cannot render quality care.

"Patients end up spending unnecessary hours in hospitals, waiting for one doctor to attend to thousands. It is the patients who ultimately suffer the most," he said.

He stressed the need for government at all levels to urgently address staff shortages, improve welfare packages and enforce humane work schedules for doctors.

He cited that while WHO ration for patient to doctor's ration is put at 1 doctor to 600, in Nigeria it remains 1 doctor to 10,000 patients.

Meanwhile, since the news of the death of Dr Rotofa, there have been out pouring of tributes across social media, with colleagues and friends describing him as a passionate young doctor whose life was cut short by a system he served with dedication.

Those close to him described him as diligent, selfless and deeply committed to his patients.

Some doctors who spoke to Vanguard described his death as shameful, queried why young doctors should be dying in 2025 from overwork.

They insisted that if this continues, the health system will keep losing both patients and doctors, adding that reform cannot wait any longer.

Death heartbreaking, unacceptable —NMA

Adding its voice, the Nigerian Medical Association, NMA, described the incident as heartbreaking and unacceptable.

Speaking with Vanguard, NMA Vice President, Mr. Benjamin Olowojebutu said: "It is extremely sad to lose our doctors in the prime of their work, dying in the line of duty. It is extremely frustrating that the workload on the few doctors left in this country has now taken a big blow.

"NMA will continue to engage relevant stakeholders on the working hours of

doctors. Right now, the working hours and workload are enormous for the few doctors remaining.

“Adequate welfare in terms of salaries, allowances, and especially a comprehensive health insurance scheme for every doctor working and living in this country must be prioritised.

“We commiserate with the family of our colleague and his friends. May his gentle soul rest in peace. This death must count for some massive improvement in the health sector.”