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Woman who tested negative to COVID-19 in Enugu dies

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**...As daughter blames death on health workers' negligence****...Deceased, a known hypertensive patient – ESUT doctor****...Enugu govt approves N320m, relocates state's isolation centre to ESUT Teaching Hospital****By Anayo Okoli & Dennis Agbo**

CONTROVERSY is currently trailing the death of the 70-year-old woman suspected of COVID-19 who though tested negative, died a day after her result was out, as a lady who claimed to be her daughter has accused Enugu University Teaching Hospital, ESUTH, where she was handled, of negligence.

The lady also accused Enugu State government of unpreparedness for the virus, despite the fact that the outbreak was reported in December.

According to the woman who remained anonymous, her mother died of stigma and negligence on the part of ESUTH health workers.

She alleged also that the isolation centre at the Colliery hospital, where her mother was isolated while her test was going on, was in "a dilapidated environment that seems to have been left uninhabited over a long period of time."

In a lengthy letter addressed to the governor of Enugu State, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, and pushed out to the social media, the woman accused the state government of not being prepared to tackle COVID-19.

The letter read: "I am writing on behalf of myself and family in regards to the 70-year-old woman suspected of the Covid-19 in Enugu published on Saturday, March 14, 2020. The patient who is my mother unfortunately passed away on Sunday, March 15, 2020 having tested negative to the aforementioned.

"She returned to Nigeria on Wednesday, March 11, 2020 after five months trip to the UK to visit her children. Whilst the health workers/officials at ESUTH/Parklane had to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves against this virus, the manner and state at which they treated my mother was inhumane.

Accusation galore

"My mother was isolated in a dilapidated environment that seems to have been left uninhabitable over a long period of time. The isolation centre in Enugu is an abandoned old section of the hospital, where the grass and debris were being cleared whilst my mother was there.

"The staff at the hospital were unprofessional in the way they handled my mother. She was stigmatised and this made her feel worthless. My mother arrived at the hospital on Friday, March 13, 2020, blood samples were collected on Saturday, March 14, 2020 with results expected on Monday 16th March, 2020.

"As declared by the World Health Organisation that this is a global pandemic, one would expect a faster testing time. My mother had to spend three days in a dire situation, without adequate health care and unsure of what is happening around her.

"If the result for COVID-19 was ascertained on time, my mother would still be here with us, as she would have been moved to a better equipped hospital with the right experts to deal with her underlying illnesses.

"My mother died due to the negligence and unpreparedness of the state in putting adequate facilities, including staff training in place. The new strain of the coronavirus was detected back in December 2019 and it is absolutely disappointing that there is no appropriate isolation centre in Enugu State", she said.

Though Enugu State government has not officially reacted to these allegations, some doctors under the platform of "Concerned Health Workers in Enugu State" have dismissed the woman's allegations as mischievous.

"As health workers in Enugu, we state that we have basic knowledge of what transpired as well as the high level commitment of the medical doctors and other personnel who worked tirelessly to manage the woman that was first rejected by all federal medical institutions in Enugu, before she was accepted by the ESUT Teaching Hospital, Parklane, Enugu.

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"On this note, we commend the Enugu State government for not joining issues with the so-called daughter of the woman who deliberately did not write her name in her baseless vituperations against the state and integrity of our medical profession.

Doctors rip into accuser

"It is disheartening that when we expected her and other family members of the woman, to show gratitude to the state government and the medical personnel for accepting to treat their rejected mother, under such intense panic and anxiety over the suspected spread of the deadly COVID-19 in the state, it was not forthcoming.

"We also feel bad to note that the daughter of the woman, who admitted her mother had multiple ailments, mischievously alleged that her "mother died due to the negligence and unpreparedness of the state in putting adequate facilities, including staff training, in place," the doctors said in a statement signed by Chinwe Udeh, Agatha Nnamani, Nkem Eze, Emeka Anene and Peter Udemezue.

All state government officials contacted to make comment on the allegation either refused to pick their phone calls, failed to respond to text messages or were even absent in their offices.

But a doctor at Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Parklane, ESUTH, who pleaded to be anonymous, told Vanguard that the suspected woman was not admitted as a patient at Parklane hospital or died because of lack of treatment.

'She was hypertensive'

The doctor said: "She is a known hypertensive woman that had typhoid separation. She died of it and typhoid separation is an emergency. The woman died at the isolation centre."

However, Enugu State Executive Council yesterday approved N320 million to prevent and/or tackle the scourge of coronavirus in the state, in case of any outbreak.

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health, Dr. Ifeanyi Agujiobi, who disclosed this to newsmen after the meeting, said the Council approved the immediate upgrade and relocation of the state Isolation Centre to ESUT Teaching Hospital, Parklane, Enugu.

He said the decision was based on the medical team's recommendation and in line with the advice from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, that Isolation Centres were best located within the specialist hospitals of states for prompt and effective emergency response.

He explained that the relocation "will be more convenient, easier for patients who may have coronavirus or suspected to have coronavirus to be attended to by medical specialists promptly and timely."

He added that the patient will have access to "the X-Ray machines, the dialysis machine and other high tech machines domiciled in the teaching hospital."

Meanwhile, as the dreaded COVID-19 continues to keep Nigerians on their toes, it is surprising that only five centres in the country have the facilities to test patients for the virus. The five centres, set up by the Federal Government are located in Abuja, Lagos, Ogun and Edo states, with Lagos having two centres.

For the South East zone, the nearest test centre is Irrua, Edo State.

The centre in Abakiliki is for testing Lassa fever patients. Though Anambra State said that it has facilities for testing viral cases at both Onitsha General Hospital and the Teaching Hospital in Amaku, Awka, it was not certain if cases of the dreaded coronavirus could be tested there.

Apart from Anambra, none of the four other states in the zone has facilities to test for virus. However, Enugu State said it has made adequate provisions for isolation centres for any reported case.

Vanguard learned from a senior health officer from Enugu Ministry of Health that it might not be easy for states to set up the test laboratory because of its expensive nature and the fact that they might not be able to follow the protocol.

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