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Triumph of having a baby after uterine cancer

BY ESTHER OLUKA
eoluka@ug.nationmedia.com

Daily Monitor first published the story of Naome Kenyegamo Kirunda in 2015. At the time, she was opening up about battling choriocarcinoma, a cancer that occurs within the uterus.

The cancer was confirmed in February 2015 and after undergoing three rounds of chemotherapy (cancer treatment), she was declared cancer free in June 2015. We featured her story later in December 2015.

"Before I was diagnosed, I was experiencing

abnormal vaginal bleeding which started in 2013. I was, therefore, forced to wear sanitary pads on a daily basis, day and night," she mentioned at the time.

After she was declared cancer free, her monthly period normalised back to five days.

Recently, on April 13, 2018, I again caught up with Kirunda, who opened up about life after cancer. "I was cautioned by a doctor against having another baby after surviving this particular kind of cancer," she says, adding, "Conceiving after the ordeal would likely cause complications including a premature or still birth." Kirunda at the time had four children. They are now 10, nine, eight and six

years respectively. In order to prevent another pregnancy, she was advised to consider a permanent birth control pill. The 35-year-old however, wanted a baby since the cancer was gone," she says

The pregnancy

In June 2016, Kirunda missed her menstruation period. She undertook a test at home which confirmed her fifth pregnancy.

"The discovery did not shock me. My only worry was how the nine months would be," she says.

Kirunda decided to visit Kisubi hospital to see a gynecologist (who already knew about

her medical history of battling choriocarcinoma).

"He was very scared for me after reasoning that a number of complications could easily surface during the time of pregnancy including getting a miscarriage, the baby developing birth defects, among other issues," she says adding,

"Despite his worries, he promised to monitor me closely until I gave birth. He strongly advised that I see an oncologist (medical specialist who treats cancer) too for a further examination."

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HOW DO YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR SELF?



"I am in tune with my body. I do have a thorough annual body checkup."

JEAN BYAMUGISHA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
UGANDA HOTEL OWNERS
ASSOCIATION



"I did a pap smear test recently and the results were negative. I do not have cervical cancer. I was happy and plan on going for the scheduled tests on time"

AYISHAR NAGUDI, BANKER



"Since I cannot afford to pay for breast and cancer screenings, I embrace the free government check-ups that are carried out from time to time."

CAROL AMAYO, MODEL

For many women, after facing a life-threatening illness such as cancer of the uterus, giving birth again becomes a distant dream. However, Naome Kenyengamo Kirunda did not lose hope. When she was declared cancer free in June 2015, she was determined to try her chances having her fifth baby.

Triumph of having a baby after uterine cancer

...FROM COVER

"I did not find reason to see one since I had previously been declared cancer free. But he insisted that I consult one as well to give another insightful opinion on my condition," she says.

Kirunda visited a specialist at Nsambya hospital. "The oncologist together with a visiting team of cancer specialists from India conducted an examination and confirmed my pregnancy. They reasoned that I was going to subject the baby, uterus and myself to more harm," she says.

To terminate?

After analysing her situation, the team advised Kirunda to undergo a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) test before the pregnancy was three months. An MRI shows detailed pictures of what's inside one's body.

In this particular case, the examination was intended to monitor closely the features of the growing baby, and, if any problems including deformity were noticed, she had to undergo a medically induced abortion.

"Doing an MRI alone requires money which I did not have at the time. I was penniless after having spent a lot of money on chemotherapy. This is why I did not go for the test," she says.

In addition to not doing the check-up, Kirunda also disregarded the idea of the abortion. "Even amidst the medicals' concerns, I refused to abort. The thought of ending my baby's life bothered me a lot," she says.

Coping

Without a doubt, Kirunda was anxious during most of her pregnancy. "I hardly worried about myself but the baby. I always wondered how it was doing inside my womb. I would feel less stressed occasionally when it made movements. That way, I knew it was alive," she says.

"I also prayed a lot during this time. I would hold my stomach and ask God to protect my baby and let them grow to full term," she says.

Her husband played the crucial role of immediate comforter, and, when Kirunda needed re-assurance, she



Naome with her baby Jubilee Talemwa. She says Talemwa's birth has so far healed her psychologically.

PHOTO BY ESTHER OLUKA

About uterine cancer

Dr Joseph Nsenga, a gynecologist at Bethany Women's Hospital in Luzira says:

"It is a malignant cancer of the placenta within the uterine cavity. The cancer often surfaces when left-behind placenta tissues continue to grow after the occurrence of an abortion, miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy (a complication that arises when a fertilised egg implants itself outside the uterus, often in the fallopian tubes) as well as growth of abnormal tissue within the uterus (a hydatidiform mole sometimes known as a molar pregnancy). The common signs of this cancer include abnormal vaginal bleeding, abnormal swelling of the tummy, anemia due to frequent loss of blood through the vagina, pain around the pelvic region, chest pain as well as difficulty in breathing especially when the spreads to one's lungs, among other reasons."

"The cancer may be diagnosed by doing imaging tests such as an ultrasound or x-ray, pelvic examination, a pregnancy test also known as the Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (HCG) to identify any high levels of the hormone HCG, often, an indicator of the cancer, as well as histological examination of expelled products. The most common treatment includes chemotherapy and surgery. It is important that the patient is emotionally supported through constant counselling," he adds.

would make a phone call to the gynecologist from Kisubi Hospital.

"I would call him at any time of day or night and he always answered the phone. He encouraged me to relax and not to be anxious," she says.

With teary eyes, Kirunda adds, "all times, he emphasised that everything was going to be alright."

Meanwhile, Kirunda went for antenatal visits at Rubaga Hospital, a facility where she had previously given birth to all her four children, naturally.

"The medical staff here also came to learn of my cancer history and we worried for me. It is for this reason that they kept a close eye on me during the pregnancy," she says.

From time to time, the team of tests to find out the mother's condition and that of the growing baby inside the womb.

"Their feedback was always positive, that, the baby was developing expected and there were no issues with my health," she says.

Kirunda carried her pregnancy full-term (nine months) and had a natural birth to a baby girl on April 6, 2017 at Rubaga Hospital. The new family member was named Jubilee Talemwa.

Jubilee and her mother today

The mother and daughter share a very close bond. "Sometimes people think Jubilee is my only child because of the way I nurture and pamper her. Well, I cherish her a lot because of the circumstances under which she was conceived," she says, adding, "She is a miracle, an answered prayer from God that He has healed me completely."

The now mother of five emphasises that Talemwa's birth has so far healed her psychologically.

"I have not encountered any health complications ever since I gave birth to Jubilee. I am doing well," she says. Whether she has recently conducted any follow-up checkup for the cancer, Kirunda says, "I do not think it is necessary. I was declared cancer-free before the pregnancy. Besides those tests are expensive and I do not want to go back to spending money and psychologically torturing myself again, thinking about the past. I have moved on." Kirunda says her one-year-old daughter is healthy and is hitting all the respective milestones.

Advise to other women

"Always go for frequent medical checkups and if any kind of diagnosis is made, ensure to adhere to the required treatment at a well-established health facility," she says.

Kirunda also advises women currently battling any kind of complication to remain positive and prayerful. "Regardless of what the doctors tell you, remember that God is the giver of life. Do not lose hope," she concludes.