

National News

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Transplant saves baby from liver sickness

The baby was diagnosed with biliary atresia. It is a serious liver disease of infancy, which has an estimated prevalence of 5 to 10 per 100,000 births, and is the leading cause of paediatric liver transplantation worldwide.

BY TONNY ABET

When Meghan Ineza Mirembe was born in August 2025 in Uganda, her parents immediately noticed something unusual. Her rich, deep brown skin carried a distinct, unnatural yellowish undertone that stood out clearly against her natural complexion.

"From birth, the baby had what is called jaundice," recounts Derrick Charles Ssembatya, Mirembe's father. Jaundice is a condition that causes yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes, and signals liver problems.

Mr Ssembatya says they never received a proper diagnosis in Uganda, and as a result, they could not find any meaningful solution to save their daughter.

"We went to many hospitals in Uganda. We spent a lot of money on treatment. But we did not get so much help here at home," he narrates. Amid this, the baby's stomach started swelling due to the accumulation of fluid in the belly. Mr Ssembatya did not give up on her daughter.

"We got in touch with a friend who al-

so had a liver problem. The friend connected us to Dr Jennifer in India," he recounts.

Mr Ssembatya says they got in contact with a liver transplant team at Artemis Hospital, one of the leading hospitals in liver care and transplant in babies in India.

"We were well received. The doctors made investigations, blood tests, scans and established that our baby's liver was already damaged and that the hepatic portal vein (HPV) that supplies 75 percent of blood to the liver did not grow," he says.

Mr Ssembatya says they had to take a difficult decision, whereby the mother had to donate part of her liver. The doctors also had to extract a vein from the neck to give to the baby.

"After preparations were done, the day came for the transplant. The transplant was done by Dr Giriraj Singh Bora and the team at the liver transplant unit. It was successful," he adds.

The condition

Dr Bora, a liver transplant surgeon at Artemis Hospital in India, says they diagnosed the baby with biliary atresia, a rare condition in which the bile ducts



Mr Derrick Ssembatya, Ms Solange Muco and their daughter Mirembe Meghan Ineza following the liver transplant. PHOTO/GEOFREY MUTUMBA

are absent or blocked.

The bile duct is a tubular structure which collects bile from the liver and takes it to the small intestines.

Bile is a digestive fluid produced by the liver and stored in the liver and its primary function is to break down and absorb dietary fats in the small intestine.

"Unfortunately, this bile duct did not develop in baby Meghan, and because of this, she was suffering from jaundice since birth. The other consequence was that fluid started accumulating inside her belly," he explains.

According to a study report by Caroli-

na Jimenez-Rivera from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Canada, "Biliary atresia, a serious liver disease of infancy, which has an estimated prevalence of 5 to 10 per 100,000 births, is the leading indication for paediatric liver transplantation worldwide."

Dr Bora says the transplant could have been avoided if the condition had been diagnosed within three months after birth. Delays caused damage to the liver that could not be reversed.

"If you diagnose this problem early, you can perform a bypass procedure, but unfortunately, in the case of Meghan, this problem was undiag-

COSTS INCURRED

Mr Ssembatya says it cost Shs100 million for the liver transplant procedure. He said other costs related to staying in India, such as accommodation, feeding and travelling, came to about Shs40 million.

nosed for a long time. By the time she came to us, she had established liver cirrhosis. At this stage, liver transplantation remains the only life-saving option for these babies," he explains.

Mr Ssembatya returned from India in early May.

"The baby is okay. She's recovering well, and post-care management is going on well. We want to thank the team at Artemis Hospital, and Dr Jennifer," he says.

"We want to thank Dr Bora. We thank the liver transplant team and everyone who has supported us through all this."

Support

The family received treatment coordination and support from DoctoGenie Medical Assistance, which has been supporting and guiding many international patients seeking advanced treatment in India.

Ms Jennifer Choudhary, the founder and director of DoctoGenie, says they facilitated communication between the family, doctors and hospital teams to ensure smooth treatment support throughout Baby Meghan's successful treatment journey.

"With each passing day, Baby Meghan's condition in Uganda was deteriorating, so immediate action was our only option," she notes.

"DoctoGenie Medical Assistance ensured priority coordination—securing top Pediatric Liver Transplant teams, providing clear cost break-ups, managing visa support, logistics, and end-to-end care in India, including assistance in-country High Commission approvals for the transplant," Ms Choudhary adds.

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