Uterus was removed without my consent - Kampala woman

Nalubega claims she became uneasy in the operating theatre after noticing what she believed were intern doctors preparing to operate without any supervision.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

A 40-year-old woman has accused health workers at Kawempe National Referral Hospital of removing her uterus without her consent after a complicated delivery that ultimately led to the loss of her baby.

Prossy Nalubega, a resident of Lugala in Rubaga Division, Kampala City, says she conceived last year and was attending antenatal care at Kawaala Health Centre IV.

However, on February 24, her pregnancy took a distressing turn when she developed complications she initially thought were labour pains.

"I felt too much pain, and was bleeding. I told my husband, and we went to Kawaala Health Centre IV, where I have always received medical care," Nalubega says.

On reaching there, Nalubega says she was very weak and asked for a bed to rest. Within a few minutes, she started vomiting severely. They gave her a drip but her situation was worsening, prompting them to refer her to Kawempe National Referral Hospital.

Ms Nalubega was transported by ambulance to the hospital, where doctors assessed her and recommended a caesarean section after attempts at normal delivery failed.

"At Kawempe, they quickly examined me to see if I could have a normal delivery. I don't know if it was the excessive vomiting that led to general weakness and I failed to push. After a few minutes, the seemingly intern doctors (two females) suggested that I proceed to the theatre to save my life," she says.



Prossy Nalubega who lost not only her unborn baby but also her uterus. PHOTO/SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

Her husband, who preferred to remain unnamed, says they agreed to the procedure. "When I reached Kawempe, my wife briefed me about the arrangement for a C-section, and we gave it a go-ahead," he says.

However, Nalubega says she became uneasy in the operating theatre after noticing what she believed were intern doctors preparing to operate without any supervision.

"I only saw young intern doctors (three males) around me. I asked why there was no senior doctor. They immediately moved out and on returning, told me the senior doctor was on the way but had allowed them to start," she says.

She further alleges that although she had been prepared for partial anaesthesia, she was instead rendered fully unconscious without explanation.

"Being fully unconscious was never discussed. I got scared when they said that was the one they would administer. I became suspicious that in this state, these young men could do the whole procedure unsupervised," she says.

> **Lost uterus. How could this happen? I was never consulted. My next of kin was not consulted either, yet he was at the hospital. Fellow patients advised us not to raise the complaint intensively because we were still seeking medical care from the facility and it could land us in problems with the health workers," Prossy Namagembe, a disgruntled mother**

Her husband says after waiting for about an hour, he was informed that the baby had died. He adds that the shocking news that his wife's uterus had been removed during the operation was also delivered within a few minutes.

"The nurse came and told me the baby did not survive and that her uterus had been removed. I was terrified, and I thought my wife had given consent to the uterus removal while in the theatre," he says.

Nalubega maintained that neither she nor her husband consented to that procedure.

"How could this happen? I was never consulted. My next of kin was not consulted either, yet he was at the hospital," she says. "Fellow patients advised us not to raise the complaint intensively because we were still seeking medical care from the facility and it could land us in problems with the health workers."

Nalubega says even after the surgery, concerns were raised by a senior doctor who later reviewed her condition.

"A doctor came in our ward looking at incisions of different mothers. When he looked at my wound, he seemed scared and called other doctors questioning why the wound looked that way. He even suggested that I might need to return to the theatre, with comments that I was also given an overdose of chloroform," she adds.

She believes the condition of her surgical wound indicates possible inexperience during the operation.

"When you look at the external wound, you wonder what it looks like inside. It has a lot of bumps on the outside, and this is all from medical negligence," she claims.

The mother, who previously operated a food business, says her health condition has left her unable to work, worsening her financial situation.

"I was paying Shs50,000 weekly on a Shs1m loan I had procured to improve my operations. I have now defaulted for 16 weeks, totalling Shs800,000," she says.

Nalubega says the experience has left her devastated and that she is determined to seek legal redress.

"What they did affected me so much. I want to sue the hospital. We are seeking justice because the doctors never consulted us," she says.

However, Mr Lawrence Kazibwe, the deputy executive director of Kawempe National Referral Hospital, says in emergencies, patients' consent may not always be required.

According to the hospital, she was informed that her uterus would be removed during the procedure.

"In instances that pose a threat to life, doctors may act without prior consent to save a patient. On arrival, Nalubega's womb had darkened and the foetus was already dead," Mr Kazibwe says.

"Being that it wasn't her first incision, a doctor explained to her that if the foetus is found dead, the doctors will go on with normal delivery. However, when she attempted, she was losing a lot of blood, and while in the theatre, the doctors told her that she would lose the uterus," Mr Kazibwe adds.

The hospital denies allegations that the surgery was conducted by unsupervised interns.

Lawyer George Musisi of Pace Advocates says the law allows medical practitioners to act without consent only under strict emergency conditions.

"If there are extraordinary circumstances and no time to consult the patient or next of kin, the burden is on medical professionals to prove that, since they have a duty to save life," he says.

He adds that if negligence is proven, the patient may be entitled to compensation.

"That was a life-changing and permanent operation. If liability is established, damages can be awarded," he says.

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