WEIGH YOUR MEDICAL NEEDS AGAINST FINANCIAL CAPACITY

EXPERTS URGE EARLY PLANNING FOR SAFE PREGNANCY, DELIVERY

By Umar Nsubuga

Christine Nassuna, a resident of Buwambo, still recalls the fear and uncertainty of the night she nearly lost her life and that of her baby. At 28, she was expecting her third child, her third caesarean section, but she had not prepared adequately for delivery.

Throughout her pregnancy, she moved from one health worker to another, occasionally relying on local herbs, without committing to a specific doctor.

When labour pains struck at midnight, she rushed to a nearby health facility, only to be referred to Kawempe National Referral Hospital.

Her husband was far away, unreachable at that critical moment. Alone and frightened, she was left in the hands of strangers.

"It was the scariest moment of my life, I did not know who would help me or what would happen next," she recalls.

At Kawempe, skilled doctors and midwives intervened and saved both her life and that of her baby.

Today, Nassuna looks back with gratitude, but also with a lesson she hopes other families will learn from.

Her story is a powerful reminder that choosing a doctor during pregnancy is not a decision to delay. It is a matter of life and death.

WHY CHOOSING A DOCTOR EARLY MATTERS

Pregnancy may appear smooth for many women, but medical experts warn that complications can arise unexpectedly. That is why consistent monitoring by a qualified doctor is essential.

Dr Hassan Mayanja from Mercy Hospital explains that antenatal care should begin immediately after pregnancy is confirmed, noting that early medical attention helps detect potential risks, monitor the baby's development and allows doctors to guide mothers throughout the pregnancy journey.

"Early antenatal visits help detect risks, monitor the baby's development and establish a relationship between the mother and the doctor, when couples delay, they miss the opportunity to identify complications early," he explains.

According to Mayanja, a dedicated doctor understands the mother's medical history, tracks her progress, and provides timely interventions when needed. This continuity of care is often the difference between a safe delivery and a medical emergency.

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Choosing between a private doctor and hospital-based care is a major decision for couples, as private consultants offer personalised, continuous care – especially valuable for high-risk pregnancies, but can be costly without insurance. In contrast, hospital care is more affordable and covers most services, though it often lacks continuity, so experts recommend weighing medical needs against financial capacity before deciding.

THE HIDDEN RISK OF LATE DECISIONS

Nassuna's experience highlights a common mistake, waiting, until labour begins to make critical decisions. This delay can lead to confusion, panic and dangerous referrals.

Dr Sam Ononge, a senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Mulago Specialised Women and Neonatal Hospital, explains that pregnancy care must go beyond routine check-ups to include proper physical preparation and early planning.

He notes that physiotherapy plays a critical role in helping expectant mothers maintain strength, reduce pain and prepare their bodies for safe delivery.

"Regular, guided exercises can prevent complications linked to obesity, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, while also improving mobility and recovery after childbirth," he says.

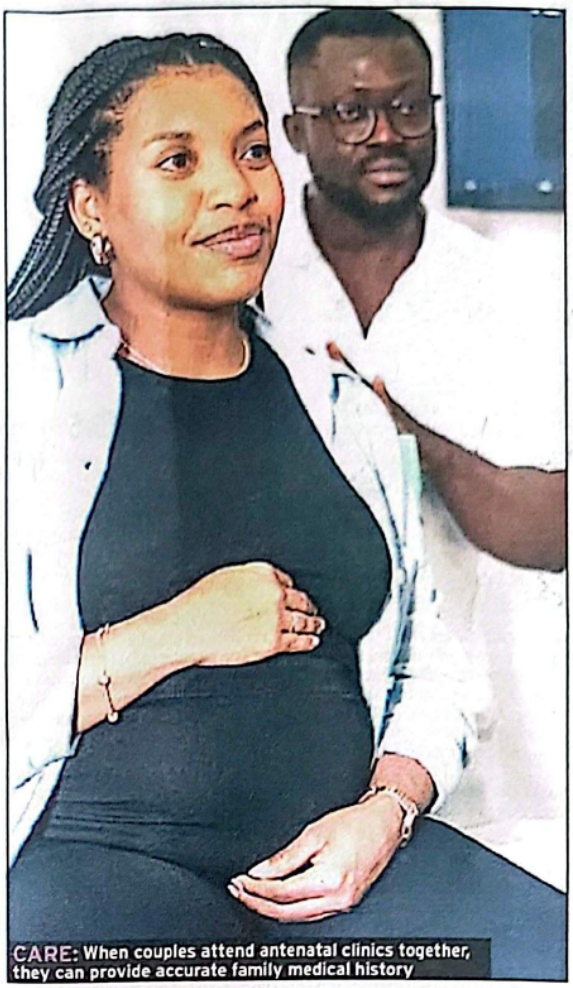
He warns that poor planning during pregnancy is dangerous. "Couples must decide early on where delivery will take place, who will handle it and how emergencies will be managed," he says.

PLANNING FOR LIFE

Gynaecologist Dr Abubakar Sempereza says pregnancy comes with financial responsibilities that cannot be ignored. From antenatal visits and scans to delivery and emergencies, the costs can add up quickly.

Men, often seen as providers, play a key role in planning for these expenses. By being involved in choosing a doctor, they can align medical decisions with the family's budget.

This preparation prevents last-minute stress and ensures that the mother receives uninterrupted care.



CARE: When couples attend antenatal clinics together, they can provide accurate family medical history

ACCESSIBILITY

Dr Sempereza explains that distance and accessibility are critical factors when choosing a doctor or health facility. In emergencies, every minute counts.

He says couples must consider how far the hospital is, the availability of transport and the reliability of services. A well-equipped facility nearby can save lives, while poor planning can lead to dangerous delays.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

Pregnancy affects a woman's body in many ways. Hormonal changes, weight gain and shifting balance can lead to discomfort and health complications. Caroline Susan Akori, a principal physiotherapist at Mulago Specialised Women and Neonatal Hospital, explains that many women suffer in silence.

"Pregnancy is physically demanding, we see mothers with back pain, hip pain, swollen limbs and even urinary incontinence", she says. She emphasises the importance of physiotherapy and guided exercises, which help reduce complications, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

"Simple exercises can improve mobility, reduce pain and prepare the body for childbirth," she adds.

WHY MEN MUST BE INVOLVED

Ali Semambo, a bodaboda rider from Matugga, shares how accompanying his wife to antenatal clinics changed his perspective.

"At first, I thought it was just a woman's issue, but when I started going with her, I learned a lot, about nutrition, health risks and how to support her," he says. Through these visits, Semambo became more involved in his wife's care, ensuring she followed medical advice and attended all appointments.

His experience reflects a growing understanding that men who participate in antenatal care contribute to better health outcomes for both mother and child.

Haspha Nassolo, a senior nursing officer at JCRC, explains that male involvement is not just beneficial, it is necessary.

"When couples attend antenatal clinics together, they can provide accurate family medical history, which helps doctors make better decisions," she says.

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