

Mothers vow never to return to Victoria Jubilee

— after claims of inhumane treatment

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Sunday, August 03, 2014



The outside of Victoria Jubilee Hospital in downtown Kingston.



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THREE women have declared that they would never give birth at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital (VJH) in Kingston again, after they said they were abused and mistreated by doctors and nurses.

The claims are the latest in a series that have been brought to the attention of the Jamaica Observer over the last few years.

One incident impacted so severely on one of the women that she became suicidal and had to seek professional counselling after she claimed she was told by the doctor in attendance that she was the reason her child died as she was too fat and too lazy to push out the baby.

The woman, who did not wish to be identified, related her story to the Sunday Observer last week.

"A month ago I was sent by my doctor to the Jubilee Hospital because I had preeclampsia, my blood pressure was 240/170 so I was rushed there," she said.

"When I went there, I had to do AIDS and syphilis tests. I was placed on the high-risk ward. That was after 5:00 the afternoon and it was nine o'clock at night before a doctor came to check me," she said.

The 32-year-old woman explained that up to that time she was not feeling any pain. However, medical personnel burst open the amniotic sac (commonly called head water) and realised that the baby had defecated inside of her.

"But I still wasn't feeling any pain," she explained. "I think at that time I was probably eight centimetres (dilated) but still not feeling any pain. They gave me an injection that they say would develop the baby's lungs. They didn't do an ultrasound or put any machine on me or anything so I was wondering how they know the baby needed to develop his lungs," she said.

She explained that at midnight they gave her something to induce labour and an hour later she went to the labour ward. By this time she said her blood pressure was higher and she was placed on intravenous fluid, since she could not take anything to bring the blood pressure down.

"While I was in labour, the doctor looked at me and said that I'm so fat I did not know that I was pregnant and I need to hurry up and get the baby out because she needed to go home," the mother claimed.

"I was slapped, her colleagues laughed at me, I was in and out of consciousness and that doctor looked at me and say how I can sleep so, I must have sleep apnoea (also referred to as apnea)," the woman said. "Her colleague told her that it was because of the drug why I was in and out of consciousness, but she said I was to hurry up and have the baby and when I finish have the baby I must go and lose weight because I was so fat and lazy."

But that was the beginning of her sorrows.

"When I had the baby he could not breathe on his own, so he was sent to the nursery. He was born at 4:36 am. When I was going to the nursery, nobody gave me any direction or took me there. I had to walk to the nursery with a bag inside of me, because the baby had defecated in me. When I went there, he was stringed up. I asked what it was and the doctor just looked at me cold and said 'no bother pay that nuh mind' because I know anything can happen when I have sex so I better call the father.

"I was weak and almost fainted and it was a nurse who looked at me and said I must go back up (to the ward) because if I drop down they can't lift me up. After 7:00 in the evening I went back to nursery. Nobody paid me any mind. All they say is that I must go back to the room because they can't lift me up," she said.

Thirteen hours after birth, her only child died.

"So I was blaming myself that it was because I was fat why my baby died," she said bursting into tears. "Nobody told me anything. I didn't get any explanation or nothing. It was a nurse who saw me crying and read my docket and told me two days later that it was the cord that was wrapped around his neck. I was placed into a ward with a lot of babies and nobody offered me any counselling, nothing," she said.

The incident has left her not only with low self-esteem, but suicidal, and she constantly blames herself for killing her child.

"I don't want to live," she said as she tried to control the tears. "I haven't spoken to my partner. I felt humiliated, embarrassed, depressed, and angry. I am normally comfortable with myself because I don't believe I am that fat, but I keep blaming myself that it's my fault because they say is because I am fat and wasn't pushing," said the woman, who weighs 220 pounds.

"I'm angry that they didn't pay me any mind. I keep asking what did I do. Why me? Why they didn't come and do an ultrasound or something, why they didn't give me an injection. Nobody has spoken to me or said anything up to now.

"The doctors there need to know that they are there to care for persons and they should have some compassion. They treat people bad. When you ask them questions they don't want to answer, they shout at you. They are there to help you and you can't ask any questions," she said.

She stated that as a result of her experience she does not want to have another child. But even if she was to, the Victoria Jubilee Hospital would be the last place that she would go to give birth, or have any related treatment at the adjoining Kingston Public Hospital.

"I would not go to Victoria Jubilee or KPH," she said firmly. "Right now I'm even afraid to go to the doctor because I'm afraid I will be insulted or that I will come out dead or something. I am at the stage where I don't want to live anymore," she said, again bursting into tears.

The counselling psychologist who has been treating the distraught mother, and who asked to remain anonymous to protect the confidentiality of her client, said that the horrible ordeal her client experienced at the hospital was less than professional and has caused great damage to her state of mind.

"The loss of a child is already a very traumatic thing for any woman -- young or old -- to wrestle with," the psychologist explained. "Symptoms of depression, which involve feelings of guilt and hopelessness, are some of the things that they battle daily. However, when this is coupled with an abusive medical staff that degrades women, then the problem is compounded even further. Suicidal ideation (thoughts of committing suicide) stemming from a shattered self-image are additional burdens that make emotional recovery even more difficult. Any woman who has an experience similar to this one will need psychotherapy to help in restoring a functional emotional state. This is a horrible thing to have happened and may just be one of many cases that should be investigated," she said.

The second mother noted that she, too, would not have another child at the VJH.

"I would not go back to Jubilee to have a baby because at some points I felt like my life and the baby's life were threatened," said the 31-year old who only wished to be called 'Kay'.

"The treatment was very bad because the nurse kept on threatening me that the baby was going to die and it was my fault and she walked off while I was having difficulty pushing out the baby. Despite the pain, she said that if I don't stop the noise she not going to help me. It was like she was punishing me for making noise," she said.

Kay explained that when she went to the hospital to give birth some months ago, the first thing that struck her as odd was being asked by the nurse to prepare herself -- this meant taking a shower and shaving herself despite not being able to bend in order to do so.

"I had my first child at UHWI [University Hospital of the West Indies] and they assisted me with shaving and all of that, so I did not know this," Kay said.

She said that while she was waiting in a room she felt she was about to deliver her baby and started shouting for help, but though a nurse passed by numerous times, she ignored her.

"I was there crying and hollering for help and the nurse walked past again and again. It was about two hours after, when I was in more pain and I started screaming out, that she came over and checked me in a manner like she was annoyed. Then she went off again. She didn't say anything to me. When I saw her again I asked for assistance to go to the bathroom and she said to just go by myself. I didn't get any assistance from her. She left me. I went to the bathroom and felt like the baby was coming down when I was using the toilet so I rushed back to the bed," she recalled.

The mother explained that in the midst of her crying and screaming the nurse returned and told her to take up her things and follow her into the delivery room.

"That was very difficult because I didn't have on any underwear and I had a towel between my legs to gather up the water and I had to be walking slow with my stuff. She didn't help me with nothing. When we reach to the room she just say 'get on the bed' -- no help or anything," Kay said.

"I was bleeding 'cause the baby was coming down, so I had to clean up myself, take out the necessary things and get on the bed. I was in a lot of pain so I asked her for assistance and she said 'no!' She said 'fix up yuself and go on the bed by yuself'. And even though I was in pain and it was clear the baby coming down, she left again," Kay added.

"I saw a different midwife when I was on the bed hollering and asked her please to assist me because the baby was coming out. She came, looked at me and hissed her teeth and said if I don't stop the noise and stop carrying on she would leave. So I said to her 'please understand I am going through a lot of pain, I can't help myself', and begged her to please help me deliver the baby. She just kiss her teeth and walked off. I didn't see her back for a little while."

That, Kay said, left her no option but to try and deliver her baby on her own.

At that point she said she felt as if she was going to die. When the hopelessness hit her she screamed as loudly as she could for help, and shouted that the baby was coming and she didn't know what to do. That's when, she said, the midwife reappeared and told her to stop the noise and once again threatened to leave if she didn't. She left, but returned shortly after and stood at a distance.

"Eventually she said the baby was stuck and if I don't push out the baby, the baby is going to be dead and it is going to be my fault," Kay recalled. "That midwife... she treated me very badly. I would never go back there... never!"

The third mother, who gave her name only as Leonie, said that while the words were not directed at her, she heard nurses telling mothers in distress that when they were taking h...d they were not crying so they should shut up and give birth. She, too, declared that the treatment at the VJH is very unprofessional and is disrespectful to women.

"I think because they feel is only people who can't afford to go private hospital go there, so is like they treat you any and any way," Leonie theorised.

Taneisha Lewis, public relations manager in the South East Region Health Authority (SERHA), said that whenever patients have a problem with the service that they receive at any of the health facilities they should file a complaint at the patients' affairs department found in all the hospitals.

"We encourage persons to file a complaint at the hospital, whether it is in writing or by a phone call, so the matter can be properly investigated," Lewis said.

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