

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
IN THE MATTER OF UGANDA MEDICAL AND DENTAL
PRACTITIONERS COUNCIL, CAP.272

AND

IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY BY THE UGANDA MEDICAL AND
DENTAL PRACTITIONERS COUNCIL INTO THE DEATH OF
JENNIFER ANGUKO AT ARUA REGIONAL REFERRAL HOSPITAL

FINDINGS AND DECISION OF THE COUNCIL

This was an inquiry conducted by the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council, in accordance with section 34 of the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council Act, Cap. 272, following an allegation of Negligence leading to death of Jennifer Anguko filed by Ms. Bako Christine Abia against staff and Administration of Arua Regional Referral Hospital.

In brief, it is alleged that the staff of Arua Regional Referral Hospital had received the late Anguko who was in labour but neglected her and she had eventually died from a ruptured uterus.

The Council called seven witnesses who all gave evidence on oath.

1. VALENTE INZIKU, (36 years old) husband to the deceased

He stated that on Sunday 10th October 2010 around 8.30 am when his wife developed labor pain she went to Arua Regional Referral Hospital. That the patient started labour at 11.00 am but had failed to deliver and the nurses were not helping. At around 3.00 pm when the patient started bleeding he was sent to buy a cannula and drip set, but on returning the bleeding had increased.

At around 7.00 pm when the nurse called a doctor, they were told that the doctor was not available, and few minutes later Jennifer said she was helpless, slowly her eyes closed, and her body became cold. He went on to say that after signing a form the patient was taken to the theatre at about 8.30 pm. but to the best of his knowledge the patient by then was already dead.

At about 9.00 pm he said a nurse told him that Jennifer was operated on but the baby was dead, then at around 11.00 pm the nurse told them that Jennifer was also dead. Later the Hon MP Baku collected the death certificate which indicated that Jennifer died of rupture of the uterus.

2. ADIRU JANE, (33 years old) sister to the deceased

She stated that she was the sister to the deceased and had accompanied her to hospital. That when they went to the labor ward she informed the nurse that the patient was experiencing increasing labor pain but the nurse told the patient to lie on bed in labor ward, but did not attend to her. Later when labor pain increased amidst bleeding, the deceased expressed fear that she might die and asked her to call her husband which she did immediately.

According to Adiru, when the first doctor arrived he quarreled with the nurses as to why he was called very late; then the second doctor came and instructed that the patient be taken to theatre.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Anguko', with a date '2' written below it.

At about 11:00 pm a nurse came to the ward carrying the body of Jennifer's dead baby, then shortly after they received sad news that Jennifer was also dead.

3. GRACE WANICAN (42 years old), Enrolled Comprehensive Midwife

She stated that it was on 10th October 2010 at 9.00am when she saw Jennifer who had come with labor like pain. Her rapid assessment revealed that she was in a fair general condition and there were no danger signs. She had one previous scar due to big baby, and her cervix was 5cm dilated. The lie of the baby was longitudinal, cephalic and foetal heart was normal. She said after reviewing other mothers she called Dr. Atiko Robert who was on duty but he did not answer.

4. YEMIMA UNGENTHO, (45 years old) Midwife

In her statement, she said that on 10th October 2010 she reported on duty at 3.00 pm, found Jennifer who had a 4th pregnancy with one previous scar, and two other mothers with complications. That Jennifer's attendant told her that the patient had been bleeding, and when she examined her she found her with signs of moderate bleeding, and this prompted her to take off blood and send to the laboratory at 8:30 pm. She said they did not use a partograph to monitor the progress of labour, she apologized for this. She said that she learnt that Dr. Gilbert Aniko was the one on call but had not yet arrived to review the patient, so she called Dr. Emmanuel Odar that sent Dr. Gilbert Aniko who was on call, at 9:00 pm

5. GRACE AVAKO, (34 years old) Registered Nurse

She stated that on Sunday 10th October 2010 she reported on the ward at 8:55pm, received patients including Anguko Jennifer, handed over to her by Ms. Yemima Ungentho. That when she went to theatre at about 9.00 pm to receive the baby she found the baby already dead and five minutes later she was told that Jennifer was not in good condition and the patient was declared dead after 10 minutes by the Anesthetist.

Grace Avako
Grace Avako
Grace Avako

6. DR. GILBERT ANIKU, (29 years old) Medical Officer, MBChB (MUK) 2007

He stated that on Sunday 10th October 2010 he was at home in the morning and in the afternoon went to visit his child at school and at 5:00 p.m, he proceeded to a friend's wedding. When he went to park the motorcycle at the Intern's mess, he received a phone call from the Obstetrician, Dr. Emmanuel Odar, who informed him that he was on call, and there was an emergency. That he went immediately to the Hospital, arriving at the labor ward at around 9:00 p.m. and Jennifer was the first patient he saw. From his quick assessment she was in critical condition, disoriented and delirious. Her pulse was rapid, abdomen distended and there was no detectable fetal heart sound. This he said made him suspect that the patient had uterine rupture, so he decided to have the patient prepared for Caesarean section immediately. When he opened the patient, he found a big volume of intraperitoneal blood and the baby was lying dead in the abdominal cavity. The patient was given assisted ventilation and resuscitated with blood transfusion. Subsequently the patient's condition worsened and she passed away. Dr. Aniku stated that he had no idea that he was on call.

7. DR. EMMANUEL ODAR, (42 years old) MBChB (MUK) 1997, MMED OBS & GYN (MUK) 2002 Consultant Obstetrician

Dr. Odar said that on 10th October 2010 he received a phone call from a nurse on duty called Yemima Ungentho at 8:00 p.m. informing him that there was an emergency and she had failed to get the doctor on call. He informed the Council that Dr. Aniku who was on call that day had no idea that he was supposed to be on call, but went to hospital immediately he called him. He said it was in the morning that he learnt of the death of Jennifer. He recalls that during the time when Jennifer was admitted there was a duty roster, but he does not quite remember exactly where it was.

8. DR. BERNARD ODU, (54 years old), MBChB (MUK) 1984, Hospital Director

He said he learnt of the death of Jennifer Anguko on 11th October 2010 from the night report of 10th October 2010. A maternal audit was carried out and cause of death was rupture of uterus and cardiopulmonary arrest.

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Regarding the schedule of duty, he said it is the Medical Director who makes the Medical Officers' duty roster, however sometime in 2010 the responsibility was assigned to Dr. Atiko Robert but later he withdrew from this responsibility.

He said there is general shortage of staff, for example on the fateful day there were only ten (10) midwives as five (5) of them were away on training. Whereas the establishment provides for twenty five (25) Specialists, twelve (12) Medical Officers, one hundred and sixteen (116) Nurses and Midwives, there is only one (1) Specialist in each of the departments of Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Internal Medicine, Mental Health and Public Health. There are Seven Medical Officers, Five Interns, 15 nurses and midwives.

He explained that shortage of staff at the facility, coupled with increased work load, burn-out and stress on the part of staff may have had a negative impact on the attitude of staff resulting in poor quality of care of the patients. He noted that the poor condition of work and low pay sometimes force the health workers to get alternative work elsewhere in order to make ends meet, and this sometimes leads to unfortunate mistakes on the part of staff.

9. HON. BAKO CHRISTINE ABIA, (35 years old) Woman MP Arua District,

She said that when she learnt of Jennifer's death, she went to the Hospital to find out from the Hospital Director what exactly went wrong. That when she demanded for the death report the Director said it was not yet ready, but later she managed to get it. She further stated that it is a painful experience to find a nurse calling a doctor using her personal phone. She further appreciated the condition under which the staff might be working but noted that the institution's failure to provide even the basic necessity for a pregnant mother seeking health care and finally dying is unacceptable. The choice of the doctors to run private practice she felt compromised their efficiency.

FINDINGS OF THE COUNCIL

Upon analyzing the clinical notes of the late Jennifer Anguko, obtained from Arua Regional Referral Hospital, and the evidence given by various witnesses in the course of the inquiry, the Council made the following observations:

1. There was delay in taking action to save the patient, given that the patient arrived at the

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hospital on 10th October, 2010 at 8.30am, went into established labor at about 11.00 am, and started bleeding at around 3.00 pm. The doctor was first called on the morning of 10th October 2010, but was not available; he only came at about 9.00 pm when he was called again.

2. The midwives on duty that day exhibited an act of professional negligence by not using partograph to monitor the progress of labor which made it difficult for them to make timely and informed decision

3. The midwife on duty in the morning, Grace Wanican did not consider calling any other doctor or the Obstetrician, even when she knew she could not get the doctor on duty to review the patient.

4. Yemima Ungentho acted appropriately when she was told that the patient had been bleeding by first assessing the condition of the patient, sending a sample of blood for investigation and immediately calling Dr. Odar who in turn called Dr. Aniku.

5. It is also clear that the nurses and midwives on duty were overwhelmed by the volume of work. On that day there was a mother with a ruptured uterus, two previous scars, arm prolapsed and two other mothers who delivered normally.

6. That the staffing level in Arua Regional Referral Hospital is seriously inadequate. For example, the establishment for nurses and midwives is 116, but the hospital has only 15.

7. The Medical Officer on call, Dr. Gilbert Aniku had no idea that he was on call until he was told by the Obstetrician Dr. Odar, who also confirms that he was not aware but responded immediately he was informed. This reveals a serious gap in scheduling of duties and communication

7. The statement made by the Hospital Director Dr. Bernard Odu indicates that he was aware of the weaknesses in the hospital, but blames it on condition of work.



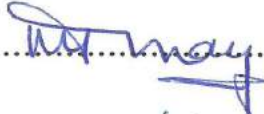



8. The Hospital Director exhibited an element of administrative weakness, when he blamed possible professional misconduct of staff on extraneous factors; for a doctor to learn with surprise that he is on call during an emergency shows a systems failure.

DECISION OF COUNCIL

- Word of caution to the Midwives and entire staff of Arua Hospital about their professional responsibilities and need to adhere to strict professional standards and inform Uganda Nurses and Midwives Council (UNMC) for further action.
- Forward Grace Wanican to the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Council over her negligence.
- Serious caution to Hospital Director and Arua Hospital Administration in general over their weak administrative responsibilities.
- Urge the Ministry of Health with immediate effect to ensure that Arua Regional Referral Hospital gets all the full complement of staff required for its status as a regional referral hospital.

MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

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| 1. Ass. Prof Joel Okullo Odom | Chairman UMDPC | 
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| 2. Dr. Ben Kiwanuka | Member | 
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| 3. Prof Harriet K. Mayanja | Member | 
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| 4. Dr. Mugisha Charles Rwenyonyi | Member | 
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