

Charity Chimwaza “Weathering the storm”



“You have passed! Congratulations!” said my Principal Tutor when I got my Nursing Diploma. Nothing compares to the happiness I felt then, to finally realise my dream of becoming a qualified general nurse.

However, the shocker came when I was deployed to work at a rural clinic, 72 km from the nearest district hospital and there was no regular transport, no network and no electricity. Imagine my disappointment, after being trained at one of the Central Hospitals in the capital city. I also learnt I was going to be the Nurse in charge of that clinic and will be taking care of a community with a population of about 10000 people. As one can imagine I was extremely scared and felt completely out of my depth. I remember asking myself over and over how I would ever manage.

Within a month on my assignment, I started feeling comfortable thinking it wasn’t that hard after all, when one day as we were about to close a child came running to the clinic out of breath. He told us that there was a pregnant woman at their homestead having fits. Did I mention that I am not a midwife? As I looked around at others to tell me what to do, I realised they were all looking at me for guidance. I have never felt so scared in my entire life, because yes, theoretically I had learnt about eclampsia but had never come across an actual case. However, a decision had to be made so I took charge and carried all the items I thought we would need and got to the homestead about a 1km away. When we got there, I had never seen convulsions like that, the woman was unconscious and in labour, and there I was thinking this was an emergency yet we are 72km away, bad dusty roads and no telephone or network to call an ambulance. I have never felt so vulnerable or challenged in my duty to save the community.

Nevertheless, we made her comfortable, took her blood pressure, inserted an IV and gave her the stat doses of the medication to try and stop the convulsations. We also checked on the baby and progression of labour. As we continued to assess the situation, we agreed that the little hut we were in would not be conducive to care for her so we decided to move her to the clinic. Our only mode of transportation was a wheelbarrow. It took us about 1hr 30 minutes to get to the clinic, thrice as long because we had to stop each time convulsions started and they would be almost every 20 minutes.

Finally, we got to the clinic, made her comfortable on the floor and checked on her adding more medication as required and that's when I almost cried as the actual labour started amid the convulsations. Unfortunately, at this stage, we couldn't hear the baby's heart beat. I was now in a panic mode asking myself how I was going to deliver a baby with an unconscious woman and amidst convulsations. I looked around at my colleagues and I saw they had lost hope. That's when I took control, feigned courage and encouraged them to help me continue doing something as long as she was breathing. All the time praying, "Please God help us save the mother at least." I continued to encourage the mother even if I knew she couldn't really hear, we were relying on her instinct as she continued to push whilst we assisted all we could for her to deliver normally. It was a long and hard labor but finally we got the baby out but we had already lost it.

After the baby was out, the convulsations reduced so we cleaned her continually checking on the mother. We continued to stress about getting her to hospital. When we heard a sound outside in the road, at first no one reacted and then as we realised what the sound meant we all burst out of the room running to the road to try and stop the car that seems to have miraculously appeared only realizing belatedly that we had left the patient alone.

The car belonged to one of the locals' son who had visited his parents and after negotiations he agreed to ferry the mother to the hospital in that unconscious state. I got in the car all the while holding her hand, continuing to check on her during the 72kms to the hospital. When we got there I cried with relief to hand her over to the midwives and doctors, all the while praying that all the effort and turmoil was not in vain.

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