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## Doctors, Police "fight off" Jehovah's Witnesses over blood transfusion

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The life of a critically ill nine-year old girl (name withheld) whose parents belong to the Jehovah Witnesses faith was saved last Tuesday when the James Town police offered protection to the medical staff of the Princess Marie Louise Children's Hospital to provide blood to the dying patient.

The police intervention was as a result of a distress call by doctors and nurses at the hospital who were faced with the challenge at the hands of the girl's parents who were protesting against the intended transfusion of blood to their daughter since it was against their faith.

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The girl, a sickle cell patient, whose blood count had gone down drastically was diagnosed by a team of doctors led by Dr Eric Sifah, Medical Superintendent of the Hospital, to be severely ill and required blood transfusion to survive.

Dr Maame Yaa Nyarko, a pediatrician at the Emergency Ward of the Hospital, told *The Spectator* that the mother of the girl, Hannah Bentil brought the patient who had the "SS" blood trait to the hospital at about 6pm on Monday looking very pale.

She said, the medical team on duty, including the nurses recognised the girl as a sickle cell patient who had not been attending clinic for counseling and guidance.

Dr Nyarko said besides being in a pale state, the colour of the urine of the patient was also very dark like 'Coca cola' indicating the fast break down of the red blood cells.

She said after the blood and the haemoglobin levels were checked, samples were taken and given to the mother to take to the laboratory.

The mother however refused to send the sample meant for the blood grouping or cross-matching that could aid the possible blood transfusion.

Even though the doctors explained to the mother in the presence of some relatives that the daughter's haemoglobin level was too low and she ought to be given blood transfusion, she flatly refused, citing religious reasons and the abhorrence by the father, Justice Bentil.

The Social Welfare Officer at the hospital was also tasked to counsel the mother but she was adamant and urged on by some friends, she demanded that the daughter be discharged forthwith.

They subsequently began making attempts to prevent the doctors and nurses from attending to the patient.

When matters were getting to a head, the doctors called for the assistance of the police to offer them the necessary protection.

Police Superintendent B.B. Bakomora, the James Town District Police commander, immediately responded to the call and dispatched a team of policemen and women to provide protection to the health team.

On the arrival of the police, some exchanges took place between the doctors and some members of the religious group lasting about two hours. The doctors finally resolved to have the girl transfused with the blood and that was done around 4.30pm on Tuesday.

Doctors said her condition was now stable and they hoped for improvement.

Superintendent Bakomora justified the actions of the medical staff, saying they owed

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it a duty to prevent the loss of life.

He said Section 79(1), (b) of the Criminal Offences Act of 1960 (Act 29) states that "A parent is under duty to give access to the necessities of health and life to the child who is not of age and capacity as to be able to obtain those basic necessities".

Source: The Spectator

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