



GHANA REGISTERED NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

(Member of the International Council of Nurses)

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PRESS RELEASE

CALL FOR URGENT NATIONAL ACTION ON THE "NO-BED SYNDROME" AMID ESCALATING PRESSURE ON EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association (GRNMA) expresses grave concern over the persistent and worsening crisis of the "No-bed Syndrome" within Ghana's healthcare system. This concern is heightened by recent developments at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital and similar occurrences across major referral facilities nationwide.

The "No-bed Syndrome" reflects the inability of patients to access timely emergency care due to severe capacity constraints, often resulting in dangerous delays and preventable loss of life.

Current Situation

Recent reports and frontline accounts reveal alarming conditions in emergency units across the country. Critically ill patients are frequently left waiting for extended periods or managed under inappropriate and unsafe conditions due to inadequate space, insufficient beds, and limited essential resources.

Such circumstances are unacceptable and constitute a significant threat to patient safety, dignity, and survival.

Key Drivers of the Crisis

The GRNMA identifies the following as critical factors contributing to the crisis:

- i. Severe mismatch between patient load and available bed capacity.
- ii. Overcrowding of tertiary and secondary facilities due to the weak referral gatekeeper system.
- iii. Inadequate emergency care infrastructure and logistics.
- iv. Persistent shortages of skilled personnel, particularly in emergency and critical care units
- v. Inefficient coordination of ambulance and referral services



Situational Overview

Available data indicate that the crisis is systemic and long-standing:

- i. Ghana has approximately 0.7 hospital beds per 1,000 population, significantly below the World Health Organization's recommended minimum of 5 beds per 1,000 population. This is worsened by the fact that as of 2021, Ghana was spending as low as 11% of Annual Budget on health contrary to the recommended minimum of 15% Abuja Declaration.
- ii. National hospital bed capacity remains limited, with about 19,907 beds recorded as of 2015, and occupancy rates approaching 100%.
- iii. Major public hospitals, particularly in urban centres such as Accra and Kumasi, are operating at 120%–150% capacity, reflecting extreme overcrowding.
- iv. At the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital alone, there are approximately 250 daily admissions and over 1,500 out-patient attendances, placing enormous pressure on emergency services and bed capacity.
- v. These figures highlight a widening gap between healthcare demand and system capacity, driven by rapid population growth, urbanisation, and the rising burden of both communicable and Non-Communicable diseases.
- vi. Recent incidents involving delayed or denied emergency care—including cases where patients were referred between multiple facilities without receiving timely treatment underscore the urgent need for systemic reform. In some instances, such delays have resulted in fatal outcomes.

GRNMA's Position

The GRNMA emphasizes that the “No-bed Syndrome” is not merely a logistical challenge but a manifestation of broader systemic failure within Ghana's healthcare delivery system.

The Association affirms that:

- i. no patient presenting in an emergency should be denied care, regardless of bed availability. Immediate stabilisation is both a professional and ethical obligation.
- ii. the current situation undermines Ghana's commitment to Universal Health Coverage and equitable access to quality healthcare.
- iii. Nurses and midwives are operating under extreme pressure, moral distress, and unsafe working conditions, often compelled to improvise care in overcrowded environments.

Recommendations

In light of the above, the GRNMA calls on the Government of Ghana, the Ministry of Health, and the Ghana Health Service to urgently:

- i. declare the “No-bed syndrome” a national public health emergency.
- ii. expand emergency and inpatient infrastructure, especially in high-demand urban areas.
- iii. implement a national real-time bed tracking and patient flow management system from district to national level.
- iv. strengthen referral systems to ensure optimal use of primary and district-level facilities.
- v. increase recruitment, equitable distribution, and retention of nurses and midwives, and other health workers.
- vi. invest in emergency medical services, including improved ambulance availability and coordination.
- vii. enforce strict adherence to emergency care protocols, ensuring no patient is turned away without stabilisation.
- viii. Health facility managements must ensure the needed logistics are procured and readily available for use at emergency units and centres.
- ix. establish accountability mechanisms, including independent investigations into recent incidents.

Conclusion

Ghana’s healthcare system cannot continue to operate beyond safe capacity while patients suffer avoidable harm. The dignity of patients and the integrity of healthcare professionals must be upheld at all times.

The GRNMA calls on all stakeholders including Policymakers, Healthcare Managers, Professional Bodies, Civil Society Organisations and the general public to recognise that the “No-bed Syndrome” constitutes a national emergency requiring urgent, coordinated, and sustained action.

The time to act decisively is now.


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