

A CRITICAL ILLNESS CAN BE MORE FINANCIALLY DEVASTATING THAN A TERMINAL ILLNESS

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While a terminal illness diagnosis is without doubt far more devastating than being diagnosed with a critical illness, the hard financial facts are that in most instances critical illnesses which often persist for many years or even decades, can be far more financially devastating than terminal illnesses.

In addition to paying for expensive medication, specialist treatment and regular bouts of hospitalization, critical illnesses can also prevent victims from working, or seriously compromises their ability to earn an income to pay for expensive and ongoing treatment.

The saying that 'a healthy person has a thousand wishes, but a sick man has only one' illustrates that illness can quickly re-prioritise the value of health in a person's life. Sadly, however, in most cases the value of health only becomes apparent once lost.

Critical illness is defined as a condition causing life threatening organ dysfunction, potentially leading to excess morbidity, heart attack, cancer, limb loss or other serious psychological reactions. If untreated or incorrectly treated, critical illnesses can cause death. Managed correctly on the other hand, critical illnesses can be cured through intensive medical management.

Critical illness insurance provides a mechanism for ordinary Nigerians to afford treatment for otherwise unaffordable conditions, alleviating pain and suffering as well as the financial devastation that treating a critical illness can cause. Viewed another way, critical illness cover is an important financial management tool, providing individuals and families a mechanism to both cover the costs of treating critical illnesses while also compensating for loss of earnings in cases where victims can't work or suffer restricted incomes.

Victims of critical illness usually require regular and ongoing hospitalisation, outpatient evaluation and various other health management initiatives, implemented over many years. As such, critical illness often leads to financial disaster, either directly from medical costs or indirectly through loss of income. The long-term costs of treating critical illnesses have serious financial consequences for the victim and their families, especially if sufferers are primary breadwinners.

From a financial perspective a critical illness can be far more devastating on a families' circumstances than a terminal illness, especially since most terminal illnesses are relatively short-lived. Also, in cases where the victim had life insurance, the family also often receives a death benefit. From a financial perspective, critical illnesses offer neither a respite in costs nor the palliative of a payout. Unless, of course, the victim or family have taken out critical insurance cover.

While people may have little or no control over the occurrence of critical illnesses, they are, however, able to determine how these illnesses affect their finances. Critical illness insurance, for example, achieves three things. Firstly, since treating critical illnesses is beyond the financial capacity of most individuals and families in Nigeria, critical illness cover takes care of the financial costs of the extended, ongoing medical management of critical conditions.



Secondly, since most critical illness covers include regular testing for key conditions, often just having critical illness cover helps people identify conditions before they become critical, buying time for preventative treatment or simple lifestyle changes able to head off the critical condition. Finally, in cases where the victim of a critical illness is the breadwinner in a family, critical illness cover also provides a degree of income protection, providing families a monthly income in instances where the breadwinner can no longer earn a salary to provide for their loved ones.

Just like taking out life, motor or household insurance, critical illness cover is simple and easy to buy and use. Considered against the suffering caused by an extended critical illness without the right treatment, or the hardship of losing the income of the primary breadwinner, critical illness cover is also inexpensive relative to the peace of mind that it provides.

More generally, once critical illness cover becomes the norm in Nigeria, hundreds and thousands of preventable and unnecessary deaths can be avoided each year, significantly lessening the burden on the National Health System by reducing the number of conditions that develop into critical illness and death.

