

MN Malaria Stories: Importance of antimalarial medication

TRANSCRIPT

When I look back at my experience of being hospitalized for malaria, things should have been different. I wish I had gotten antimalarial medication, and I wish there would have been more trust between me and my medical providers.

I was attending college in Wisconsin, and I had not been home to Nigeria in 6 years. It had been so long since I visited, I felt like I had lost a part of myself. I really missed being together with my family and eating food like pounded yam with Egusi soup and bush meat. I was finally able to go back and see family for a month during a summer break. I didn't go to a travel clinic because I thought malaria could be treated easily and that I had immunity from growing up in Nigeria.

A week after I returned to Wisconsin, I didn't feel right. I thought it was the jetlag and the trip. I was excited to push myself at another semester of college, but I was so tired and weak. I felt cold even though it was summer and warm outside. But I knew something wasn't right when I had no appetite, so I went to the clinic.

I said "I have malaria," but the clinic said there is no malaria in the U.S. They didn't test for malaria, even after I told them that I just came back from Nigeria. They sent me home after one test. I was really worried and anxious. What was wrong with me if it wasn't malaria?

I eventually developed a fever and chills, and I felt so sick and miserable that I was admitted to the hospital. When they finally ran a blood test for malaria, it was positive. I had known what my body was telling me all along.

I felt really isolated and uncomfortable at the hospital. I couldn't see my friends when they tried to visit, and it felt like the care I received wasn't done compassionately.

This was a frustrating and traumatic experience for me. Looking back, I wish I had known how important it was to protect myself from malaria, and that this could have been prevented with antimalarial medication. I would have also done more to advocate for myself at the clinic. The difficult hospital stay might not have happened if the trust was there and I had gotten the appropriate treatment and care sooner.

If you are visiting friends and family back home, please go see a doctor before you travel to a country with malaria. Tell them how long you will be gone so you have enough antimalarial medication for your entire trip. I don't want anyone to have the experience I had. Take care of yourself on your travels.

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