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Spokane Hospital Terminates Fifteen Nurses Following Tragic Suicide of Young Patient

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The recent suicide of 12-year-old Sarah Niyimbona at Providence Sacred Heart Children's Hospital in Spokane, Washington, has led to the termination of fifteen nurses and disciplinary action against another, raising serious questions about patient safety and hospital practices. The Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA) alleges these firings were retaliatory, targeting staff who spoke out about the incident, while the hospital claims the nurses violated patient privacy laws.

On April 13, 2025, Sarah Niyimbona, described as a compassionate and outspoken middle schooler, slipped out of her room at Providence Sacred Heart Children's Hospital and jumped from the fourth floor of a parking garage, resulting in her death. According to a report by The Spokesman-Review, Niyimbona had been admitted multiple times in 2024 for suicide attempts and was under psychiatric care. Despite her history of self-harm, critical safety measures—such as a round-the-clock sitter, video monitoring, and a door alarm—were reportedly removed, allowing her to leave her room undetected, as detailed in a lawsuit cited by InvestigateWest.

Nasra Gertrude, Sarah's mother, expressed her anguish to InvestigateWest, stating, "I ask what happened. How come she left the room without anybody seeing her? How come she walked all the way to the elevator without anybody seeing her? They haven't given me any answer at all. I trusted this hospital to take care of my daughter." The lack of supervision has fueled outrage and prompted a state Department of Health investigation, which remains ongoing, to examine the hospital's adherence to safety protocols.

Providence Sacred Heart Children's Hospital asserts that the fifteen nurses were fired for improperly accessing Niyimbona's medical records, a potential violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which protects patient privacy. Jen York, a hospital spokesperson, told The Spokesman-Review, "Providence takes violations of our code of conduct and federal privacy laws that govern private health information very seriously. We review employee conduct and take appropriate action, including termination of employment, where warranted." The hospital has also implemented new protocols, including suicide risk screenings for all patients, as confirmed in a statement to The New York Post.

The WSNA, representing the nurses, disputes the hospital's claims, arguing the terminations were retaliation for staff speaking to the media about deficiencies in Niyimbona's care. The union has filed a grievance to seek reinstatement for the nurses, a process that could be lengthy, according to WSNA spokesperson Bobbi Nodell. The nurses' actions, the union claims, were part of their clinical duties in a crisis, not privacy violations.

Sarah's family, devastated by her loss, has filed a lawsuit against the hospital for alleged negligence and medical malpractice. A GoFundMe page described Sarah as a "shining light" whose compassion touched many. Her sister, Asha Joseph, told PBS, "We're confused how this could happen. We want to know why there wasn't anyone there at the moment, why

there was nobody watching her.” The tragedy underscores the urgent need for robust mental health care and oversight in hospitals to prevent such heartbreaking losses.