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# of a supportive employer

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Abdullah describes his experience to our volunteer

By TWC2 volunteer Jay L

In a normal company, when an employee injures himself or herself at work in the course of duty, generally the management will follow up with the employee to make sure that the employee is well taken care of, and need only to focus on recovery.

This evening at TWC2, I hear two stories from migrant workers which seem a far cry from “normal” companies. Their

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# Abdullah

Abdullah, 26, heard a crack from his back and felt pain while handling a loaded wheelbarrow over rough ground. It was Friday, 18 November 2022. He was taken to a doctor in Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Novena where he was treated as an outpatient. He had a painkiller injection and was prescribed pills for the next several days.

He spent the next seven days lying on his bed. When I ask him to describe how much pain he was in, he replies that he could hardly stand up or walk. "Many many pain, jalan jalan cannot". With him being immobile, his roommates helped bring him his meals, collecting them downstairs and bringing the food up five storeys to his room each mealtime.

By the following Monday, Abdullah could take the pain no more. The pills didn't seem to work. He rang his supervisor about that; the supervisor came to the dormitory, and took him to a small clinic in the Lavender area.

Why not back to the hospital? We don't know.

After the consultation, Abdullah was told to leave the room by the supervisor and the supervisor remained inside to

We would point out that it is **not proper medical ethics** for a doctor to discuss a patient's case with an employer or his representative, especially when it is the employer or his representative who has sent the patient out of the room. The doctor's responsibility is to the patient, and in the case of migrant workers, the patient is an adult. The employer is not the guardian such as in the case of juvenile patients.

In this instance we don't know what was said in the room; the doctor could well have told Abdullah's supervisor to go away and not discuss the matter.

However, TWC2 has come across many other cases where, after the injured worker is sent out of the consultation room, the employer or his representative influences the

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was said.

Abdullah was then further prescribed more painkillers which he took for another week but his condition did not improve, he says.

After another week or so, Abdullah decided to take matters into his own hands, and on the recommendation of a friend, took a taxi to Tan Tock Seng Hospital to seek medical treatment.

“Taxi I pay myself,” he tells us.

He also paid for the consultation at the emergency department (over a hundred dollars) out of his own pocket.

When the boss learned that he had taken the initiative to go to Tan Tock Seng Hospital, he got angry with the employee. Instead of offering support to an injured worker, the relationship broke down completely.

Listening in to my interview with Abdullah, a senior volunteer commented that...

*Abdullah’s work injury compensation claim was not filed until December. We do not know who filed it. However, it should have been notified to the Ministry of Manpower (and the claim filed/triggered) within ten days of the employer knowing that he had been injured, which was on 18 November 2022. We know that the company knew of the injury since the company took him to the first hospital, but no notification seemed to have been made within the ten days after.*

*One cannot help but wonder if, instead of going back to the same hospital, taking Abdullah to a small clinic when pain persisted and speaking*

leave, or persuades the doctor to issue a Light Duty instead of a Medical Leave certificate.

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Abdullah's Work Permit has since been cancelled, but fortunately, his treatment is continuing.

## Shikder

Shikder, 41, was injured for quite a different reason from Abdullah. He says he was assaulted and hurt by two co-workers on 15 April 2023. He was hit on his head, neck and back. The neck area was sensitive as he previously had surgery there. Aside from his injuries, he is particularly upset that the company management has been unsympathetic to his situation, instead taking the side of his attackers.

He concedes that he had had difficulty with a supervisor for a few months, and the incident followed yet another disagreement they had, but the attack was unprovoked. When no one came to his assistance, he called the police at first opportunity. The police came to the location and conveyed him to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital where he was kept in a ward for one night and then given five of medical leave upon discharge.

Shikder filed his injury report in April after the supervisor came to him about four days later and told him that he would be losing his job and repatriated. Shikder felt that was completely unfair. He promptly filed an injury report with the Ministry of Manpower.

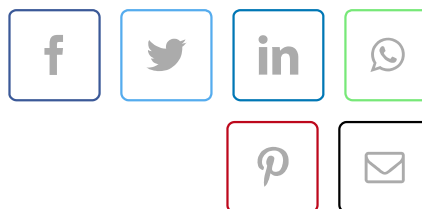
The ministry must have intervened, because the company has kept him on his Work Permit since – the permit is valid as of the date of the interview. He says he is not given tasks nor overtime, and this has resulted in a loss of earnings, but it's not clear to me why he should expect to be working when he should be on medical leave. He is convinced that the company is doing this as a form of punishment. He says, "Company no support me. Company supporting [the] two men."




His more immediate issue concerns a doctor's note saying that an MRI scan is required. The doctor may be concerned that he continues to report pain in his neck. In Singapore's healthcare system, employers of migrant workers are supposed to sign off on Letters of Guarantee (of payment) so that hospitals can go ahead with the needed procedures. Employers don't actually

treating him since the incident, he is concerned that they will simply refuse to do so. He has come to TWC2 this evening to get help over the MRI, and he is referred to a casework for follow-up.

Singapore claims to be a First World country. Looking at how Abdullah's and Shikder's cases have been handled by their employers, with aggression thrown at them instead of support, there's a side of Singapore that may be more Third World than First.

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