

FINAN INVESTIGATIVE

FILIPINO NURSE BULLIED, DISTRESSED

*"I felt very distressed and sad. I worked at that place for years and have always maintained a good working relationship with everyone"-
Esmeralda**



● **Name is changed for the anonymity of the concerned Filipino Nurse*

Service with passion, paid with hatred

Esmeralda* migrated seven years ago to seek greener pasture in the Nordic Region. She started working as a Nursing Assistant in a Nursing Home and has given all her heart and dedication to giving full service to the residents. Due to constant changes in the management position, she

felt dismayed, betrayed, and attacked by the company she thought was her family for many years.

"I have been employed in that place for several years and I have not had any issues with anyone, not even with co-workers, past nurse managers, nor with our previous long-time team leader."

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Bullying defined

Based on Esmerelda's experiences, she defines bullying as a repeated inappropriate behavior or action towards an employee or employees, for example, the act of one party making intimidating and unreasonable threats or imposing unjustified and unfair sanctions on another, within the working environment/relationship.

Narrating the incident

At first instance, she received a notice posted at her department where she was considered an "outsider" but unaware of the issue.

"The first instance happened about two weeks after my resignation from my previous employment. I found out that there was a "notice" written at my old workplace that I, along with two other previous co-workers, were not to be let inside the department because "we were outsiders". Prior to this, the two other workers had an issue with the employer, and there was talk that that could have been the reason regarding this action towards them. However, I was completely unaware of all these happenings, had I not been contacted by another previous co-worker."

Esmerelda's workmates were even wondering why she was dragged with the issue even though she is not involved with the case. It all happened when she made her resignation and started her post-graduate studies. With total dismay, she felt the sanction is was unjustified and unfair.

"I have been too busy with my new work and with the starting school semester. To the best of my knowledge, I was not involved in any issues with that previous employer, and I cannot see any good reason for myself to be "banned" from entering the work premises. It was not like I was constantly visiting said premises after I resigned. I just went there once to do a shift as a part-time worker, and I have never visited at any other time. Even my other co-workers were wondering how I became involved in this after they were made aware of the notice. I did take offense because people in the workplace who would see the said notice will think that I did something wrong, to deserve a special mention of that kind. This "sanction" was unfair and unjustified. With how I saw it, my only involvement in all of this stems from my friendly relationship with the two other workers. And for that reason alone, this new nurse manager (most likely with her boss' blessing) decided that I, too, deserve to be banned."

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Accused of breaking the law, but was a threat to discredit

When she was about to leave the workplace, to change her workplace, every single explanation was considered a chance for her nurse manager to discredit and threaten her. Even though she explained her side, she was never heard nor given the chance to explain.

"The second instance happened almost a month after my resignation, still involving the same manager. I was merely trying to clear some old schedule-related issues with this nurse manager so I decided to send her an old picture of my work schedule. She proceeded to tell me that I have seriously broken the law on data privacy because she said that it was forbidden to take photos of "official documents" such as this, as it lists the names of the other workers too. She then informed me that she was going to take this forward and we will see what happens. I was seriously distressed when I found out about this and even had a panic attack at my new workplace. I had no malicious intent when I took a picture of the work schedule, and I have never shared it with anyone else."

Mental state affected, panic attack

"It was just for my own personal use because I lose the paper copies very easily. When I was on the phone with the manager, it felt like she was very unforgiving and was already set on not believing any of my explanations. I consider this as workplace bullying as it felt more like a personal, repeated attack on me and was being handled in an unprofessional manner, how she was saying that she cannot believe me because, in her head, I belonged to this group of supposed untrustworthy people."

She could concentrate on her work and had panic attacks after the incident.

"It felt very threatening and intimidating when I was informed that I have "very seriously" broken the law. I lost sleep over stressing and had difficulty focusing at work the following day."

Esmeralda tried to defend herself from these bullying episodes by clarifying directly to the nurse manager what was the notice all about. Upon confrontation, the nurse manager pretended that nothing happened and informed her that it was just about Covid19 restrictions.

"Who makes specific lists of people's names to be not let into their previous workplaces due to Covid restrictions? I

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Effects of Workplace Bullying

Distress and loneliness were the effects of workplace bullying on Esmeralda. She also developed anxiety and skepticism when dealing with superiors or co-workers

"For both instances, I felt very distressed and sad. I worked at that place for years and have always maintained a good working relationship with everyone. I cannot believe how many issues I now have with this new management after my term of employment has ended. This made me warier of my actions at work. I have also developed some form of anxiety and skepticism when dealing with superiors or co-workers and their sincerity when they are talking to me. I now feel like I have to always be on guard because at any moment, these "friendly" superiors can suddenly make a complete turnaround and harass or bully others for no good reason. And of course, I realized that I need to learn more about workers' rights and laws of this country."

Recommendation to other foreign nurses

"For foreign-born nurses who are currently experiencing or have experienced bullying at the workplace, I recommend for them to seek professional advice regarding their situation. If you are in the right, then you will know when and how to push back against these bullies, in a correct and professional manner. Also, educate yourselves and learn about your own rights and familiarize yourself with relevant laws as well. This will help you stay out of trouble and will keep you from getting bullied or abused at the workplace. "

Foreign-born nurses must recognise that their rights are protected by the legislation of the country. Esmeralda advised them to acquaint themselves with the rules and regulations pertaining to labour. Also, the ability to be straightforward like Finnish people is something that foreign-born nurses must learn to confront situations of bullying immediately.