

SHARING OF EXPERIENCES FROM MIGRANTS ON HEALTH ISSUES

1 Fe

She worked for more than 5 years with her employer. Because her employer was always busy, she could not find time to seek medical help whenever she got sick. She took only pain relievers and antibiotics. Then she became seriously ill, her employer had no choice but to bring her to the hospital. The diagnosis was unexpected. She had tuberculosis. Her employer immediately terminated her employment contract. Fe stayed at the hospital until she could find a boarding house to stay while taking medication and awaiting the decision of the Labour Department about her case. Although her employers later paid all the monetary obligations according to the employment ordinance, their attitude towards Fe was inhuman and unjust. No amount of money can compensate for the love and attention I invested for my employer's family especially in taking care of her children. This was Fe's comment about her experience.

2 Virgie

Two days after telling her employer that she had cancer, Virgie was told that her employment contract was being terminated. She pleaded with her employer not to terminate the contract. She promised that she would shoulder the cost of her medical treatment as long as she would be allowed to stay in Hong Kong but to no avail. Her employer dreaded the thought that something would happen to Virgie while she was under her employ. "Go home and spend the rest of your days with your family," they told her.

Virgie sought help from the Mission for Migrant Workers. She was fully aware that she would be affected by the Immigration Department's Two-Week Rule. She was desperate. Deportation to the Philippines was like an early death sentence for her. She had already applied for extension of stay but the immigration officer just threw back her documents to her and said, "Go back to your country for medication."

On the last day of Virgie's visa in Hong Kong, the Mission called the media and reported her case. Her story aroused both indignation and sympathy from the Hong Kong society. Soon after, the Mission got a call from the Immigration Department informing them that they would further study Virgie's case.

Clearly, access to health services in Hong Kong was not easy for a domestic worker like Virgie. She needed to assert her basic rights before she was granted permission to stay and undergo chemotherapy, radio therapy, and later an operation. That was more than seven years ago. Virgie survived the cancer.

It's interesting to note that her present employer took all the risks in employing her so long as the Immigration Department approved her visa.

(sources of information: Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society)