A REWARD FOR ADDITIONAL WORKLOAD

Your family matters are no concern of the clinic. We are a serious establishment!
“A Reward for Additional Workload” is a title of Tiri for the Aga Khan Development Network Civil Society Programme. It includes a series of other comic strip booklets that challenge the reader on the role of ethics and integrity as contributors to success in the conduct of business.

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Introduction

Fatima is a doctor who has worked at the City Medical Clinic for several years. She has a reputation among clinic staff and patients for being a good employee and a professional therapist. The clinic is under new management and new director, Ahmad Hashem decides to change the policy related to patients’ services. He recommends keeping in touch with patients after treatment in order to help them recover completely. He invites Fatima to his office and verbally orders her to take over responsibility for this. However, this new assignment has not been included in Fatima’s work contract. Fatima can barely complete all these additional tasks because of her huge workload. She meets several times with Hashem to discuss her concerns about her workload and the additional tasks. She is repeatedly assured by Hashem that she needs to carry out these additional tasks. A few months later a commission from the Ministry of Health makes an assessment of the clinic’s patients after-care services. It finds serious gaps in the work of the clinic. After receiving the commission report, the director of the clinic is furious and, finding Fatima’s work performance unacceptable, fires her.

Characters

1) Fatima Avshar - a doctor at the clinic
2) Ahmad Hashem - director of the clinic
3) Gezal - Fatima’s colleague
THE NEWLY APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF THE CLINIC, AHMAD HASHEM HAS COLLECTED THE STAFF MEMBERS AND IS MAKING AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

AHMAD HASHEM TO THE STAFF.

As your new director I am officially announcing that from now on we will have to radically change the clinic's policy, as well as the quality of the medical services we provide.

ONE OF THE STAFF ASKS.

What will this new policy be?

ANOTHER STAFF MEMBER.

We will be keeping in touch with our patients after they have left the clinic, and treat them as outpatients.

What calls for these changes?
AHMAD HASHEM HAS INVITED FATIMA TO HIS OFFICE, FOR A TALK.

Such are the requirements of international medical standards, as well as of our Ministry of Health.

I believe you’ve heard that we are changing our policy, and will be providing after-care services, to help patients continue treatment after they have left the clinic?

I have. I was at the staff meeting.

I would like you, an experienced therapist, to be in charge of this work and to personally visit all the outpatients.
Very well. But please, remember, that I am overloaded as it is, and there are over 100 after-care patients in my area.

You don't have to worry. If there is too much work, we will send someone to help you cope.

FATIMA IS TALKING TO GEZAL, HER COLLEAGUE.

Ahmad Hashem, the new director, wants me to be in charge of the outpatient service.

GEZAL TO FATIMA.

You should be pleased. He might increase your salary.
He mentioned nothing about a raise, though this isn’t just about money. All those patients at the clinic and the baby at home will hardly leave me any time for this work, too.

Why don’t you ask Ahmad to relieve you of some of your duties at the clinic?

A few days later Fatima runs into Ahmad Hashem in the entrance hall. She asks him.

Mr. Ahmad, could I have a word with you about this new assignment for after-care patients?

Maybe I should.
AHMAD TO FATIMA.

Is there a problem?

As a matter of fact, there is. It's hard to manage all the work at the clinic and the outpatients, too.

So you should try to better manage your time. What is there to discuss?

I hoped you could either relieve me of part of my duties at the clinic, or allocate an assistant to help with the outpatients.
AHMAD TO FATIMA.

Neither of your requests is realistic. We don't have enough specialists to do your work for you, and as for hiring an assistant, the clinic can't afford such extravagance.

What shall I do, then?

Schedule your visits to outpatients after the working hours at the clinic, and work harder. You will manage.

What about my baby son? He needs to be taken care of, too.
A FEW MONTHS PASS. FATIMA IS STILL TOO OVERLOADED. NOT ONLY HAS SHE NO TIME TO VISIT ALL HER OUTPATIENTS, BUT SHE SCARCELY MANAGES TO TREAT HER PATIENTS AT THE CLINIC.

AHMAD HASHEM TO FATIMA, LOSING PATIENCE.

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FATIMA IS TALKING TO GEZAL.

I am desperate. I am not coping with my duties, either in or out of the clinic. And there is no hope that the situation will ever improve.

GEZAL TO FATIMA.

There is a rumour that we will be having visitors from either the Ministry or some international organization. Let's hope they will help improve the situation.

Let's hope so.
Indeed, a commission from the Ministry of Health soon visits the clinic to examine the quality of the medical services it provides. In its final report, the commission highlights the shortcomings of the after-care services, namely, that not all the outpatients have been receiving timely medical advice, medication or treatment. Infuriated by the report, Ahmad Hashem calls Fatima to his office.

Ahmad to Fatima, angrily.

You have failed in the responsibilities entrusted to you. I wanted the world to see our innovative management, but what people saw was our failure.

But, Mr. Ahmad, didn’t I warn you that I was not coping with so much work? You said you couldn’t help me.

Ahmad to Fatima, losing patience.

You warned me? In writing? I have no memory of seeing any such paper.

Fatima to Ahmad, mortified.

But you... You didn’t tell me to apply in writing!
Why would I? What kind of professional are you, if you need to be told simple things?

FATIMA TO AHMAD, AS IF TRYING TO JUSTIFY HERSELF.

I approached you several times, with my request.

AHMAD HASHEM TO FATIMA, IRONICALLY.

Indeed?

What I remember are some complaints of a personal nature.

Those were not just some complaints - I was telling you that I had to care for my baby son.
SOME TIME LATER THE MEDICAL PERSONNEL OF THE CLINIC ARE TO BE TESTED FOR CERTIFICATION. AHMAD HASHEM IS THE HEAD OF THE TESTING COMMISSION. HE FINDS FATIMA’S PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE UNSATISFACTORY AND SUGGESTS THAT SHE BE DISMISSED.

**AHMAD HASHEM TO FATIMA.**

Who in the commission cares for your family problems?

We have had quite a number of complaints from patients that you have failed to provide timely medical services.

**AHMAD HASHEM TO FATIMA, WITH IRONY.**

You know that I was assigned overtime work with after-care patients.

A responsibility in which you also failed!
AHMAD TO FATIMA, ANGRILY.

I won't listen to your excuses. Your performance has been unsatisfactory and you are fired.

FATIMA MEETS GEZAL, HER COLLEAGUE, IN THE CAFE.

Now I see - you were his scapegoat for his poor management of after-care patients.

What do you know, after all this overtime work and hard hours, not only did they not have a kind word for me, but the new director dismissed me!
I don't think so. He wrote in the notice that I was fired for my unsatisfactory performance as a therapist at the clinic.

He would, wouldn't he? How could he have blamed you for work with outpatients, when he didn't sign a contract, nor pay for your overtime work?

But it was for this additional work that I had to neglect some of my duties at the clinic.

But no one really cares, do they?
What about the Ethical Commission of the clinic?

My advice is - take your case to the court. They could find a fair solution and - who knows - maybe restore you to your work?
QUESTIONS

1. What would you do in Fatima’s place:
a) Would you refer the case to the court?
b) Would you refer the case to the Ethical Commission of the clinic?
c) Would you seek a journalist’s assistance to publish an article in your defence?

2. How do you think the case would be resolved in court?

3. To what extent should the clinic be expected to honour a verbal order of the clinic’s director?

4. How might the arrangements regarding Fatima’s responsibilities have been handled better?

5. What ethical norms have been infringed?

6. What aspects of stakeholder trust in the clinic might be affected as a result of this episode and how?