



CURRENT CHALLENGES

Nari went back to work post maternity leave and in her first week she was suffering with fatigue and aches to such a great extent that she was signed off sick. Lung function tests confirmed damage to her lungs and she struggles to breathe, which impacts her ability to do tasks. She used to cycle into work.

She is still on sick leave but has requested the flexibility to work from home. At the moment she doesn't know if and when she will return. She tires easily and has support to take care of the baby. The child, now a toddler, is exhausting and Nari can't keep up.

NARI

HR Team Leader

AGE 32

GENDER Female

NATIONALITY Dutch Citizen of Korean heritage

FAMILY SITUATION Married to her Dutch partner who live together in Amsterdam. Had their first child together during COVID pandemic. She refused the vaccination as she was unsure of the impact and unfortunately caught COVID. Before birth, she was taken into intensive care with breathing difficulties and has now recovered to a certain extent. The baby was born early but doing well. She's been diagnosed with long-covid.

JOB/CAREER International HR Team Leader working for a multinational.

PERSONAL THOUGHTS ON GENDER EQUALITY Fairly good knowledge of HR and employment law, including gender equality. Nari is becoming more interested in mental and physical health issues in relation to women in particular.

ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS

- Nari, a high achiever and perfectionist, is struggling to make sense of the situation she finds herself in; she has had a real crisis in confidence in both her identity as mother and as a professional. She feels her dreams of career progression and having another child are on hold. She has been informed she may recover, but at the moment it's a slow process. She feels her husband doesn't quite understand how tired she gets and he still has high expectations of her which she can't meet. She used to cook fresh meals now they live on ready meals.

MOTIVATIONS

- Nari was very career focused and still is, but she has had to rethink her priorities. They still have bills to pay and the mortgage on their townhouse. A friend in HR in another organisation suggested she might be deemed as suffering a disability and be able to claim benefits support. Nari is reluctant to do this as she feels it's giving up on her career goals.

WORK SITUATION

- Nari is now trying a phased return working mornings only, working from home. She has not enjoyed this and feels out of sync with colleagues. She's only been out a while, but processes have changed and some personnel. The move to working online was stressful; she's missed online meetings and has forgotten how to use all the different software on her laptop. Colleagues have been very kind, but it's a pressurised environment and no-one would offer to help her with her workload. She should be managing others but has no energy for it. She's just in survival mode and is burning out.
- A few people are talking about her behind her back and blaming her for not having had the vaccination. There's some ill feeling that she is on light duties while others are covering her workload for no more pay.

Manager's questions

- What can I offer to support Nari?
- How can I prevent this from having an impact on other team members?
- Will the team support her in the interim period while she recovers?
- What's her legal status?
- What is she entitled to?
- If she does have to leave due to ill health, what are the options for such a young person?
- How can I stop rumblings about 'unfair treatment' emerging in the team?
- At the end of the day, I need the work to be done; can I recruit a replacement?

Peers/colleagues' questions

- Nari's at work but she's not mentally present. What arrangements are in place for managing and supporting us while Nari is ill?
- Can they make her redundant?
- There are rumours they will change sick pay arrangements to cut costs: can they do this legally?
- Is she ill or is it because she has no child care?



Individual's questions

- What is my status? Will I recover? Am I disabled for life?
- What impact will this have on my family and my marriage?
- Is my career over?
- When will I know if I'll get better?
- If you are classed as disabled can your status change?
- Could I get benefits if I can't work, even though I try to get back to normal-what flexibility is there for long term health conditions?
- What if I can't manage this phased return... what then?

Policymakers' questions

- Can any adjustments be made to accommodate Nari's needs?
- What training do managers need to deal with long Covid issues in staff?
- To what extent do sickness policies need reviewing to catch up with long Covid?
- What social policies will need to be reviewed to incorporate developments?
- What is the current home working policy and does this need to be reviewed?

