

My name is Ronald Cortez a senior care assistant from a nursing home in the Isle of Man. Back in 2003 I applied for a job coming here to the UK to work in a nursing home as a senior care worker. I left the Philippines in December 2003, 8 days after I got married. It was a deal between me and my girlfriend that if I get the job we will get married and she will follow me after a few months. So we got married and I flew to a totally new world for me because it was my first time out of the Philippines. It was a difficult decision to leave her and my child behind but we are starting a family and I want to give the best opportunity for my family. I was scared when first arrived in the UK because of all the new things that I have to learn around me. In fact when I first arrived I found out just then that the company who recruited me from the Philippines did not have any accommodation ready for me.

I was lucky to have a Matron who was very supportive and as well as the staff members in the Home. She said that I have to look for my own accommodation and pay rent from the salary that they will pay me. I think out of pity or luck one of the staff offered me a bedroom for a month till I get my own place. Within 4 years of being in the UK many things happened to me. I managed to bring my wife and son over and my wife got pregnant again. We were blessed that we even managed to get a mortgage for our family. But all of these blessings came to a halt in June 2007 when I saw the memo from our company stating that

"The Home Office have informed the Company that they have recently reviewed their process of issuing work permits for Senior Carers and they have decided the level of expertise to perform the duties of Senior Carer in the Independent Care Sector does not now meet the criteria for issuing a work permit for this position. Therefore all new and renewal applications for a Senior Care Worker Work Permit will be refused."

I never imagined my self being so cold and helpless just because of a piece of paper. My wife was due to give birth then in a month's time.

So the change in the immigration rules was really devastating news for us. I felt that both the Philippine government and the British government have let us down. And why we ask? A few months time after that memo from our company came out several Filipinos and other migrants from other nationalities decided to go home rather than be deported or arrested.

I am also aware that some stayed illegally and went to do cash on hand jobs caring for elderly in their private houses. Others lost their house like me and became homeless for a while. We felt very scared, fearful and insecure about our future and that of our children....

Honest and hard working tax paying migrant workers who just want to raise a family or just want to have descent life who has never been a burden or taken anything from the government has been put into a limbo of ever changing immigration law. Even though there was a point when the Home Office said that the reason for this change is to protect us from abusive employers

especially those who pay us below the minimum wage this is still a very lame excuse for me. Some senior carers lost their jobs because their employer couldn't pay them the new going rate. Sorry but I could not see the so called protection there. I don't even know if whoever had the idea to change the requirements on the renewal of our work permit, has put into consideration the "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families". When all of this happened we felt lonely abandoned by the same system that brought us here.

Most migrant care workers have to work long number of hours and this is not always about money. We usually extend because we have to. Because we work in a caring environment, where dealing with vulnerable people who most of them looks at us as the closest thing to a relative...sad to say.

When duty calls for us to extend our hours we do it...up to a certain extent. But some migrant care workers who don't know or has not been informed about the legal number of working hours are pushed to the limit, thus making them ill or the quality of care they are providing becomes very poor and both staff and those vulnerable people end up losers. Sometimes it makes me wonder why employers who work their staff to death get away with it. I know that people from the social care system are working very hard to keep the standard high but care staffs who don't know their rights are abused.

And because of this recent change in the renewal of work permit or visa for senior carers I managed to talk to a lot of my colleagues who has shared to me some stories that most of us won't believe. For example. Employers not giving their migrant staff holidays or annual leaves for two years or employers holding their staffs travel documents, for me this is the saddest part. Recruitment Agencies from the Philippines rips off couple of Senior Carers 2000-4000GBP of their money which for sure they just loaned or borrowed when Health Care Companies here has paid everything for all successful applicants.

I'll be ending my speech by thanking Unison who gave Senior Health Care Assistants hope and confidence to stand up and fight for our rights. The late Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody for believing and fighting for us. And to Compas specially Ms. Isabel Shutes for inviting me here. I hope this research would make a difference for us Migrant Workers.