

## Tan Tock Seng Hospital Dismisses Blogger Ngerng

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It cites conduct, misuse of work time as factors

BLOGGER Roy Ngerng, who is being sued by the Prime Minister for defamation, was yesterday fired with immediate effect by his employer, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

The hospital said it was terminating his contract because of "conduct incompatible with the values and standards expected of employees, and for misusing working time, hospital computers and facilities for personal pursuits".

In statements he put out online, Mr Ngerng first said he respected the hospital's decision, but later said he felt his sacking was politically motivated.

The 33-year-old, who runs the Heart Truths site, is being sued for defamation by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for alleging that the PM had criminally misappropriated Central Provident Fund (CPF) monies.

TTSH said Mr Ngerng had been employed on a yearly contract for the last two years as a patient coordinator at its Communicable Disease Centre.

Explaining what led to his dismissal, it said his supervisors had found him "misusing TTSH time and resources to pursue personal and non-job-related interests".

"In May this year, TTSH issued him a formal letter warning him of his misconduct when his contract was up for renewal, but decided to give him a chance and renewed his contract," it said.

"However, Mr Ngerng disregarded the warning and continued to misuse company time and resources to access non-job-related social media sites to pursue his personal interests."

His recent public actions and conduct also caused the hospital "grave concern", it said, citing the defamation suit.

The suit arises from a May 15 blog post. He was asked to remove it immediately, apologise, and give a written offer of damages and costs. Mr Ngerng took down the post and apologised.

Subsequently, Mr Lee's lawyer, Senior Counsel Davinder Singh, accused Mr Ngerng of repeating the libel via a video, other blog posts and e-mail. Mr Lee rejected Mr Ngerng's offer of \$5,000 as damages and began legal proceedings against him on May 29.

Yesterday, TTSH noted that Mr Ngerng had publicly admitted to the defamation and that it was without basis. "While our staff are free to pursue their personal interests outside work, they must conduct themselves properly, honourably and with integrity.

"In particular, they cannot defame someone else without basis, which essentially means knowingly stating a falsehood to the public," it added.

TTSH said his "neglect of duty" and "improper public conduct" compromised his work performance and were contrary to the high standard of integrity required of employees. His disregard of the hospital's warnings and advice made his continued employment "untenable", it said. He will receive one month's salary in lieu of notice.

The Health Ministry issued a statement to say it supported TTSH's decision as Mr Ngerng's actions "show a lack of integrity and are incompatible with the values and standards of behaviour expected of hospital employees".

Mr Ngerng went on Facebook to say he had been fired. In his first post, he said: "The stress of the court case has made it difficult for me to concentrate on my job. And my advocacy on the CPF has also taken a (toll) on my ability to do my job."

While proud of what he achieved at work, he said he "could have done a lot better" in recent months, adding: "My supervisors have been patient but they also have a responsibility to uphold and I respect that."

But in a later post, he said: "I had wanted to give my employers the benefit of the doubt, but the truth of the matter is that the sacking is politically motivated."

He told The Straits Times that both his statements applied - he respected TTSH's decision, but upon thinking it through, he also felt it was politically motivated.

Singapore Human Resources Institute president Erman Tan said companies have to decide whether an employee's behaviour tarnishes the corporate image or hurts the organisation's value system. He said TTSH is making a stand that employees should not use work time to pursue other aims like politics or misuse its public resources for personal gain.

But sociologist Tan Ern Ser said Mr Ngerng's supporters will likely agree that his dismissal was politically motivated. "Some others may see a correlation between the defamation saga and the sacking and think of it as not purely coincidental," he added.

As of last Friday, Mr Ngerng had raised more than \$91,000 through crowd-funding for his legal defence.

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