

NYU Nurse Is Fired After Calling the Gaza War a ‘Genocide’ in Speech

NYU Langone Health gave the nurse, Hesen Jabr, an award for her work. She said hospital officials then fired her because she made pro-Palestinian remarks in an acceptance speech.



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By Joseph Goldstein

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Earlier this month, NYU Langone Health bestowed an award on a labor and delivery nurse for providing compassionate care to mothers who had lost babies. But shortly after, the nurse said, the hospital fired her over the speech she gave when she accepted the award.

In it, she spoke of the suffering of Palestinian women amid the Israel-Hamas war, which she called a “genocide.” The nurse, Hesen Jabr, is not the first medical worker to be fired at NYU Langone, a major New York hospital system, over commentary about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The hospital is currently embroiled in a lawsuit by a prominent cancer researcher, who was fired from his job as the director of its cancer center after he posted a variety of anti-Hamas political cartoons. Some included offensive caricatures of Arab people.

A young doctor-trainee was also “removed from service” at an NYU Langone hospital on Long Island, according to the hospital, after being accused of posting a message on Instagram defending the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel — though he was later quietly reinstated.

In her speech, according to a video she posted on social media, Ms. Jabr drew a connection between her work with grieving mothers in New York and the war in Gaza.

“It pains me to see the women from my country going through unimaginable losses themselves during the current genocide in Gaza,” said Ms. Jabr, who is Palestinian-American. “This award is deeply personal to me for those reasons.”

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She added, “Even though I can’t hold their hands and comfort them as they grieve their unborn children and the children they have lost during this genocide, I hope to keep making them proud as I keep representing them here at NYU.”

Ms. Jabr said that these remarks led to her firing on May 22 after she returned to work following the ceremony. “As soon as I walked into the unit, I was dragged into an impromptu meeting with the President and Vice President of Nursing at NYU Langone to discuss how I ‘put others at risk’ and ‘ruined the ceremony’ and ‘offended people’ because a small part of my speech was a tribute towards the grieving mothers in my country,” she wrote in a post on Instagram. She said that she then worked most of her shift before being summoned to an office where she was fired and escorted off the premises.

Israel has categorically denied the accusation that it is carrying out a genocide in Gaza.

A spokesman for NYU Langone, Steve Ritea, confirmed that Ms. Jabr was fired following her speech, saying that there had been “a previous incident as well.”

“Hesen Jabr was warned in December, following a previous incident, not to bring her views on this divisive and charged issue into the workplace,” Mr. Ritea said in a statement. “She instead chose not to heed that at a recent employee recognition event that was widely attended by her colleagues, some of whom were upset after her comments.”

“As a result, Jabr is no longer an NYU Langone employee,” he added.

Mr. Ritea did not say what the “previous incident” was. On Facebook, Ms. Jabr suggested there had long been workplace tensions. Her postings described heated political arguments on the labor and delivery floor. “The pure psychological warfare NYU has waged on me as a nurse, Muslim, Palestinian, and woman, has only left me resolute,” read one message she posted on Facebook.

Ms. Jabr’s activism dates back to her childhood: When she was in fifth grade in Louisiana, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on her behalf after she was forced to accept a Bible from her school principal. “This is not my first rodeo,” she said in an interview Tuesday evening.

Ms. Jabr, who had worked at NYU Langone since 2015, said that in recent months she had been questioned repeatedly by hospital administrators about her social media postings about Israel and the war in Gaza. She described her speech at the awards ceremony as “the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

Other employees around the country have been fired, suspended or investigated for their comments about the Israel-Hamas war. While some states, such as Connecticut, have restricted the ability of employers to fire workers for their opinions or speech, New York’s protections for workers are more limited.

In Ms. Jabr’s case, she had been invited to the lectern and delivered a brief speech at the awards ceremony, where, according to the hospital, she had received an award given to “a nurse who exemplifies what it means to provide compassionate care to patients and their families during perinatal bereavement.”

Before turning to the war in Gaza, Ms. Jabr expressed gratitude to her co-workers, saying the award belonged to them: “Truthfully, it does belong to all the nurses on labor who have held the hands of a grieving mother.”

In the interview, Ms. Jabr defended her speech and said talking about the war “was so relevant” given the nature of the award she had won.

“It was an award for bereavement; it was for grieving mothers,” she noted.

Joseph Goldstein covers health care in New York for The Times, following years of criminal justice and police reporting. [More about Joseph Goldstein](#)