

7 - Supportive Supervision

Storyline:

A new supervisor joins a team of frontline workers (FLWs) who have been struggling to reach their immunization targets. The story opens with a FLW wrapping up a home visit with a caregiver and the supervisor looking on. After the FLW has finished, the new supervisor asks the FLW to report back to the clinic in the afternoon as she wants to individually review progress.

On the way back to the clinic the FLW meets a second FLW in the field who also says that the supervisor has asked to meet individually. The FLWs both feel very nervous that they are going to be chastised for poor performance without the supervisor trying to understand the underlying causes of the low numbers. This concern is based on the way their previous supervisor would only monitor their performance and would scold them for poor performance instead of helping them or taking into consideration their practical challenges.

During the individual meetings the supervisor asks the FLWs about the challenges they face that are keeping them from achieving their targets. The FLWs appreciate the opportunity to share their perspective and the supervisor acknowledges that the challenges are not due to poor performance. The supervisor commits to personally looking into the issues with vaccine delivery.

The final scene portrays a team meeting. Prior to the start of the meeting, the FLWs discuss amongst themselves how relieved and excited they are following their individual meetings. When the supervisor arrives, she explains to the team that she has developed a system for acknowledging performance improvement and for using peer mentorship to support staff who needs additional assistance. She also encourages the FLWs to come directly to her for help with figuring out how to address difficult cases. The supervisor and FLWs are excited about these new opportunities for sharing and supporting each other so that they can maximize their performance and improve health of the community.

Characters:

Izara	Supervisor
Aaron	FLW 1
Zala	FLW 2
Kayla	FLW 3

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Scene 1 – Exterior – Entrance of a caregiver's house

A scene in the field where a FLW is counseling a young mother holding a baby at the doorway of a house. The new supervisor is standing nearby listening to the interaction. When the session is finished, she asks the FLW to report back to the clinic in the afternoon. The FLW is nervous and talks to another FLW on the way back to the clinic.

Aaron (*speaking to the caregiver at the door of a house*): You can ask me any questions about the immunization schedule that I just shared with you. And make sure that you bring the immunization card with you to the clinic each time.

The mother nods and thanks the health worker.

Izara (*new supervisor*): Ok Aaron, please report to the clinic this afternoon as I want to individually review the progress that each of you on the team has made. I'll see you later.

Aaron (*nervously*): Yes Izara, I'll be there this afternoon.

(Aaron is worried and starts walking back and meets Zala on the way. They both meet and start talking as they walk back to the clinic.)

Zala: Hi Aaron, how are you? Why do you look so worried?

Aaron: Hi Zala! I'm glad to see you. I am nervous because the new supervisor was in the field with me this morning and has asked me to come back to the clinic to talk about my progress.

Zala: Yes Aaron, she has asked to speak to me too! The new supervisor seems very strict. She has called for individual meetings already with each one of us. I heard that she has put up a notice on the board with a regular schedule for each of us to meet with her individually. Considering that our center has not been able to meet targets as of late...

Aaron: I'm sure she's just like the last supervisor. Always scolding us for things that weren't even in our control.

Kayla: I'm so nervous about facing her. And that too, all by myself!

Aaron: I know what you mean, I'm afraid about the same thing. How will we manage to explain to her about the dire conditions of this area, and the reasons for this center not meeting its targets?

Zala: And what if she's even worse than our last supervisor?

Kayla (*sigh*): Is that even possible? I mean, I remember the last one told me that my family life should have no interference with my work, that the fact that I had kids to look after was my problem, and that my daughter's illness was no excuse to miss a target.

Zala: Let's just hope to survive these individual interviews with her...

(Kayla and Aaron nod in despair as they both walk back to the clinic from the community)

Scene 2 – Interior – Area Health Facility, Supervisor's office

(Zala walks into the supervisor's office for her scheduled meeting, very scared and submissive.)

Izara: Hello, Zala. Take a seat.

(Zala sits)

Izara: So Zala, I have been going over the team's performance and I have noticed the targets have not been met.

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(Zala gulps, waiting to get scolded for all of it. She is looking down.)

Izara: Have a biscuit, Zala.

Zala: Huh...

Izara: You seem very tense. I have asked you to come in here because as an important member of the team, your input is very valuable. I want to understand what's standing in the way of our team achieving its targets. I know that you are all very capable, hardworking individuals.

Zala: Well... I mean if you really want to know; the vaccine deliveries to our center are always delayed, which means caregivers who bring their children for vaccination are sometimes asked to leave and come again another day as we have run short on supply. So even though we manage to convince caregivers to bring their children in for immunization, they obviously won't come around repeatedly after leaving the center disappointed.

Izara: *(looking worried)* Of course! This is truly a huge problem Zala, and I'm so glad to hear that you have identified the root cause. But may I ask: why have you all not addressed this problem yet?

Zala: Ma'am, this has been the situation for the past few months, since before you came. And when we reported it, nothing was done.

Izara: Oh, that's not good. Zala, you tell me, what do you think we should do about it?

Zala: Well, when the problem began, some of us took the liberty to draw up the estimated need and a simple schedule that the delivery people can follow.

(hands Izara the schedule)

Zala: It would ensure that we neither waste vaccines, nor do we ever run short when we need them most. We can only request you to speak to the authorities and convince them to follow this schedule.

Izara: That's a great idea! I will get a head start on this.

Zala: Really ma'am, I can't believe you just let me offer a solution!

Izara: Yes Zala, it's essential to involve your team in the decision-making process. I value your contribution – and your idea is splendid. Always remember, two heads are better than one!

Scene 3 – Interior – Health Facility

(The supervisor has called for a team meeting at a tea shop in the community. Before the supervisor arrives the FLWs are discussing how their encounters with the supervisor went. They are all pleasantly surprised that they now have a supportive supervisor who treats them well, appreciates their work and helps them find practical solutions rather than just criticizing them all the time.)

Aaron: I am so relieved that the meetings last week with ma'am Izara went so smoothly. I really didn't expect them to be of this nature.

Zala: Exactly, I thought she was meeting with us individually to reprimand us for our poor performance, but instead she made it all about helping us solve the perpetual problems that have been hindering our work. And I do feel I can perform better now.

Aaron: Same here. What about you, Kayla?

Kayla: Great! Ma'am Izara was so understanding about my situation with my daughter and she told me that I could have flexible hours, as long as I continued taking my work seriously and completing my targets. She even recommended some exercises that I could do with my daughter. I have never had a supervisor take such personal interest in my well-being. With her guidance, I have been feeling so motivated, I feel like I can achieve anything.

Aaron: That is wonderful. It's so great to have a supervisor who is actually helpful rather than being intimidating and criticizing us all the time. I had no idea how recognition, appreciation and rewards could be such strong motivation factors.

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(Izara, the supervisor walks in, and everyone settles down)

Izara: Hello team.

Team: [collectively responds to the greeting]

Izara: You must be wondering why I asked you all to meet me at this tea shop today. I wanted us to gather together and celebrate your successful efforts these past few weeks. I am very pleased with the work you all have been doing. Although I have been hearing that a few challenges still persist, so far you have all been doing great work despite the difficult conditions, and I'm really glad that you have remained motivated.

Team (with big smiles): *[applauds for self, along with Izara]*

Izara: Since you all are each other's best support system, you need to work together. And whenever you face a challenge that you have trouble overcoming individually, remember that your peers might be experiencing the same thing or they may have experienced the same in the past, and may have some wisdom to share on the issue. I strongly believe that having a well-connected and cohesive team is a big opportunity to learn from each other's knowledge and experiences.

Kayla: Ma'am, your words of encouragement and support have motivated us to do even better!

Izara: When I was starting out as a supervisor I was learning on the job too. I saw good and bad supervisors and over the years I have learned and realized what a difference good supervisory skills can do to motivate FLWs to do even better. Its not hard - these are skills that we all can learn. Just as we ask you to work with empathy when you communicating with caregivers, similarly supervisors should also show empathy towards their team and be supportive supervisors.

Team: *[again there is applause and fade out]*

The End.