



**HR Memorandum 99-5:
Sick Leave Monitoring**

TO: Deans, Directors and Departmental Chairs
FROM: Office of Human Resources Management
DATE: April 5, 1999
SUBJECT: **SICK LEAVE MONITORING**

This is a policy memorandum and should be filed in your "Human Resources Memoranda." The memorandum with the same subject (HRM-93-5) dated June 14, 1993, is now obsolete and may be removed from your binder.

BACKGROUND

As a matter of State policy, all Executive Branch State agencies are required to develop and implement an absenteeism monitoring program to reduce to the extent possible such sick leave abuse that may exist. In response to this requirement, SUNY System Administration has also mandated that each campus implement a sick leave monitoring program.

In addition to satisfying these external mandates, a policy governing sick leave usage is important to the University for other reasons. While the majority of employees use sick leave properly, improper use of sick leave can present a serious organizational problem. Abuse of sick leave is particularly difficult because it cannot be anticipated. It causes reassignment or delay of work, additional costs for overtime pay and deterioration of the services provided by your unit. In addition, inappropriate use of sick leave can create morale problems for co-workers who often must cover for the absent employee. Improper use of sick leave also harms the individual employee, eroding protection against loss of income in the event of an accident or extended illness and depriving the employee of credit toward health insurance premiums, and in some cases, service credit upon retirement.

Fundamental to the monitoring concept is the accurate maintenance of the monthly or biweekly time records. Accurate and well maintained records provide employees and supervisors with appropriate and timely accrual information, are necessary for employees to qualify for benefits such as Worker's Compensation, and may often establish eligibility for non-work related benefits such as automobile no-fault or disability insurances.

Accurate time records also form the cornerstone for monitoring the use of paid leave. Regular review of time records by supervisory staff helps ensure against excessive or inappropriate use, and will trigger positive steps for intervention when abuse is suspected. Corrective action serves to enhance the productivity and efficiency of the work unit, assures equitable treatment of employees, and encourages the accumulation of adequate balances for those occasions when medical emergencies or illnesses arise.

MONITORING THE USE OF LEAVE CREDITS

In order to establish the basis for a leave monitoring system, the Office of Human Resources Management has developed a computerized leave accrual system utilizing PeopleSoft. This system provides for the collection of leave accrual and usage information for all paid leave credits by reporting period as follows:

Employment Category	Categories of Paid Leave	Reporting Period
Classified Service	Sick, Vacation, Personal, Compensatory Leave and Holiday Leave	Two Consecutive Pay Periods (4 weeks)
Professional Service (12-month or college-year obligation)	Sick and Vacation	Monthly
Professional Service (academic year obligation)	Sick	Monthly

We have now collected approximately three years of leave credit usage information, and plan to begin providing periodic reports to department heads showing aggregate leave usage by reporting period for the most recent twelve-month period. (The programming required to maintain information on specific dates and days of the week on which sick leave was used was prohibitive. However, that information is on the monthly attendance records and can be easily referenced as the need arises).

INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE SICK LEAVE ABUSE

Any workable leave monitoring program vests primary authority and responsibility to identify and deal with problems with the immediate supervisor. While our computerized reporting system is intended to enhance the first line supervisor's ability to identify and intercede with problem employees, we will produce the report by major organizational unit (department) so that a chair or director can better compare relative levels of usage

among employees. It will be the chair or director's responsibility to distribute the information down the organization to the appropriate level.

When reviewing employee attendance, particular attention should be paid to frequent unscheduled absences, usage of sick leave to extend weekends or holidays, or situations where the supervisor has reason to believe that the sick leave was used for other than the intended or allowable purposes.

DEALING WITH SICK LEAVE ABUSE - CORRECTIVE ACTION

There is no hard and fast rule as to when sick leave use becomes inappropriate. Excessive absenteeism is one potential abuse; so might be an observable pattern of absences wherein a disproportionate number of absences occur in conjunction with weekend or other pass days, or the substitution of sick leave for annual or personal leave. Identification of inappropriate leave usage requires that the supervisor exercise judgment and discretion. Each case must be handled individually and the particular facts and circumstances carefully considered and evaluated. Likewise, there are a range of options open to you for dealing with abuse, from refusal to allow an absence to be charged to sick leave (or other credits), up to and including discipline.

When sick leave abuse is suspected, the supervisor should hold an informal discussion with the employee, ascertain the reason for use, and advise the employee of the supervisor's concerns. In many cases a legitimate explanation will emerge, and no further action need be taken. If in the supervisor's opinion, however, the explanation is not acceptable, then the employee should be so advised. If the absence at issue involves inappropriate use of sick leave for one or more specific days (e.g. an employee request for annual leave for a day was previously denied, and the employee subsequently calls in sick for that day and you doubt the credibility of the illness; or, an employee who has been directed to document absences due to illness or injury fails to submit a physician's statement), you should not allow the charge to sick leave without first checking with the Office of Human Resources. It may be more appropriate to move the charge to another leave category, or even hold the employee in "no-pay" status for the time in question. We will be pleased to advise you in these instances.

If the issue does not relate to specific days but to a pattern of use or excessive use, formal counseling should ensue. Supervisors should keep in mind that counseling is intended to be positive and constructive; it is not meant to be disciplinary. The employee should be informed of the reasons for concern; i.e., total number of days absent, a detected pattern of abuse, unusually low accrual balance, etc. The supervisor should express confidence that the employee will remedy the problem, and may also point out possible consequences for not doing so, including disciplinary action, should the problem not be corrected. A formal document memorializing the conversation should follow the counseling session, with a copy to the employee's official personnel folder in the Office of Human Resources Management.

In addition to counseling, the University may at any time during a period of absence charged to sick leave request medical documentation to substantiate a claimed illness.

(Such requests are governed by contract provisions, so supervisors should contact the Office of Human Resources Management for specific guidance). The physician's statement should include the following information:

- patient's name;
- dates disabled (including date initially seen by doctor);
- nature of illness and prognosis;
- statement of total disability from work;
- date of return to work without restrictions.

Should requested medical documentation not be provided, appear incomplete, or be suspect in any way, the supervisor should not approve a charge to sick leave for the day or days in question. In these situations you should call the Office of Human Resources Management for advice on how to proceed.

Questions regarding this policy may be addressed directly to James Mancuso at 437-4700. He will be pleased to assist you.

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