

6 Tips for an Effective Absence Management Program.



1. It is known to the staff.

Like any other program or policy, if the staff aren't aware of it, it will not succeed, either amongst the staff or potentially in front of an arbitrator. It is also important that the staff understand that the employer does have the legal right to terminate employees for excessive absenteeism, under appropriate circumstances.

2. It identifies where there is a real problem.

If a system identifies anyone at or slightly above the average absence level for a job or group of similar jobs, it will in effect be identifying a lot of staff! Many plans identify those who have very poor absence levels. This is done by the use of a multiplier effect. Once the average absence level has been identified, that number is multiplied by a set number (often 1.5), and anyone whose absences are at or above that number are deemed to have an excessive absence level and are subject to the process within the program.

3. It allows for appropriate comparisons.

Comparing the absence record of clerical staff to outside workers is not appropriate, and can raise concerns about the validity of the system. Compare the absence records of similar type of employees, even to the point of individual job titles.

4. It requires medical information.

While it is not appropriate for an organization to have personal details about the cause of illnesses, it does have the right to get medical opinions from the employee's personal health care provider. Information such as whether or not the cause is a recognized handicap under the Human Rights Code or an opinion on when the employee can, if ever, reduce the level of absenteeism, is appropriate for the employer to enquire. It is also appropriate, under certain circumstances, for a neutral health care practitioner to be utilized for an opinion under the Program.

5. It recognizes the importance of the Human Rights Code.

In order to be valid, absences that are the result of recognized handicaps under the appropriate Human Rights Code cannot be included in absence calculations. That means that absences due to work-related injuries (in Ontario and other jurisdictions) as well as any disease so identified cannot be included in absence calculations. It is important that, at each meeting with the employee, the question is asked if the reason for the absences is a handicap under the Human Rights Code.

6. It is taken seriously by Management.

While an effective Absence Management Program often takes a considerable time (two years at least of meetings), management must be committed to the process. Meetings must be held in a timely matter, and the information used as the basis for the meetings must be accurate.

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John Box, CHRP, Q. Med.