

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

JEANETTE R CHAMPION
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-13796-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CATHOLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES - IOWA
Employer

**OC: 09/18/11
Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the October 5, 2011 (reference 01) decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call on November 14, 2011. Claimant participated with In-Patient technician Melissa Erickson. Employer participated through Human Resources Business Partner Jenni Grandgeorge and Technician Intern Operations Manager for the In-Patient Pharmacy Cindy Conn.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full-time as a pharmacy technician for the in-patient pharmacy from October 2008 and was separated from employment on August 30, 2011. On August 29 she had unnecessary books and papers in the clean room in violation of pharmacy guidelines. A coworker reported via e-mail that claimant had been in the clean room repeatedly reading a book. The clean room is a sterile room for preparation of IV products. The rules prohibit papers other than orders or paper backing on the syringes. Everything else has to be sprayed with sterile alcohol. Claimant admitted she had been reading a book during down time after her work was caught up. She did not say she was doing so in the clean room. She had not been warned about similar issues in the past. She was in the IV room but not in the clean room and sat down at the computer with her book for the first time at 5:30 a.m. before her shift ended at 6:30 a.m. She was unaware of other work waiting to be done. Since the e-mail directive about the issue came out earlier in the year, she had not taken any materials into the clean room.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

871 IAC 24.32(1)a provides:

Discharge for misconduct.

(1) Definition.

a. "Misconduct" is defined as a deliberate act or omission by a worker which constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of such worker's contract of employment. Misconduct as the term is used in the disqualification provision as being limited to conduct evincing such willful or wanton disregard of an employer's interest as is found in deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior which the employer has the right to expect of employees, or in carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design, or to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. On the other hand mere inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, failure in good performance as the result of inability or incapacity, inadvertencies or ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good faith errors in judgment or discretion are not to be deemed misconduct within the meaning of the statute.

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). Negligence does not constitute misconduct unless recurrent in nature; a single act is not disqualifying unless indicative of a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. *Henry v. IDJS*, 391 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa App. 1986). Poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Employment Appeal Board*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa App. 1988).

In an at-will employment environment, an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy; but, if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job-related misconduct as the reason for the separation, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. The conduct for which claimant was discharged was not a violation of the clean room policy, and reading

during her first break of the shift when there was work to be done was merely an isolated incident of poor judgment; and inasmuch as employer had not previously warned claimant about the issue leading to the separation, it has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate certain performance and conduct. Without fair warning, an employee has no reasonable way of knowing that there are changes that need be made in order to preserve the employment. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The October 5, 2011 (reference 01) decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/kjw