IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS

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

STEPHANIE M SCHOLAR
Claimant

PINNACLE HEALTH FACILITIES XVII LP
Employer

APPEAL NO. 10A-UI-12789-MT

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE DECISION

OC: 08/01/10
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated September 2, 2010, reference 01, which held claimant eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a telephone conference hearing was scheduled for and held on October 26, 2010. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Pat Wiltfang, Director of Nursing, and Becky Booth, Payroll and Human Resource Coordinator. Exhibit One was admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether claimant was discharged for misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and having considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on July 31, 2010.

Claimant was discharged on August 3, 2010 by employer because claimant did not notice that a nurse in her charge was 30 minutes later coming back from break. Claimant reported the incident upon her first having knowledge of the failure to return. The floor was properly staffed even with a missing nurse. Claimant did not create a hazard for residents by understaffing. To the contrary, the floor was overstaffed, so the missing nurse did not pose danger to residents.

Claimant had a prior written warning on her record May 16, 2010.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code section 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.

871 IAC 24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

871 IAC 24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and the employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. Allegations of misconduct or dishonesty without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. If the employer is unwilling to furnish available evidence to corroborate the allegation, misconduct cannot be established. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations, and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that one unexcused absence is not misconduct even when it followed nine other excused absences and was in violation of a direct order. Sallis v. EAB, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984), held that the absences must be both excessive and unexcused. The Iowa Supreme Court has held that excessive is more than one. Three incidents of tardiness or absenteeism after a warning has been held misconduct. Clark v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 317 N.W.2d 517 (Iowa App. 1982). While three is a reasonable interpretation of excessive based on current case law and Webster's Dictionary, the interpretation is best derived from the facts presented.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning safety. Claimant was warned concerning this policy.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because even with a nurse missing, the staff was sufficiently large to care for the residents properly. Claimant was only 30 minutes late in noticing the missing nurse. This is not sufficient to cause a safety issue in light of the overstaffing. No danger was posed to the residents by claimant's oversight. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was not discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is eligible for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated September 2, 2010, reference 01, is affirmed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.

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Marlon Mormann
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

mdm/kjw