

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

KAYTLYN M DUFFIELD
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 14A-UI-07095-DT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CARE INITIATIVES
Employer

OC: 06/15/14
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Care Initiatives (employer) appealed a representative's July 1, 2014 decision (reference 01) that concluded Kaytlyn M. Duffield (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on August 4, 2014. The claimant participated in the hearing. Treve Lumsden of Equifax/TALX Employer Services appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from two witnesses, Brandon Kranovich and Linda Grinstead. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

OUTCOME:

Affirmed. Benefits allowed.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on July 1, 2013. She worked part time as a certified nursing aide (CNA) in the employer's Ottumwa, Iowa long-term care nursing facility. Her last day of work was June 9, 2014. The employer discharged her on that date. The reason asserted for the discharge was excessive absenteeism.

The employer's policy provides for discharge if a claimant has nine absences in a twelve-month period. The claimant's final absence occurred on June 1, 2014. She called in an absence that day due to a family emergency, as her father was in the hospital with complications from a surgery. This incident was actually the claimant's thirteenth absence. Of the twelve prior absences, ten were due to personal illness and two were due to babysitter issues. She had not been given a prior written warning, but had been verbally warned on April 18, 2014 that she was at seven absences.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. *Cosper v. IDJS*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The question is not whether the employer was right to terminate the claimant's employment, 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 is misconduct that warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate matters. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988).

In order to establish misconduct such as to disqualify a former employee from benefits an employer must establish the employee was responsible for a deliberate act or omission which was a material breach of the duties and obligations owed by the employee to the employer. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 275 N.W.2d 445 (Iowa 1979); *Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The conduct must show a 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. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon*, supra; *Henry*, supra. In contrast, 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. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon*, supra; *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984).

Excessive unexcused absenteeism can constitute misconduct. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(7). A determination as to whether an absence is excused or unexcused does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's attendance policy. Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(7); *Cosper*, supra; *Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa App. 2007). Because the final absence was related to properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct and no disqualification is imposed. Further, the employer has not established that the claimant's absenteeism overall, while perhaps excessive, was due to excessive unexcused absences. The employer has failed to meet its burden to establish misconduct. *Cosper*, supra. The claimant's actions were not misconduct within the meaning of the statute, and the claimant is not disqualified from benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's July 1, 2014 decision (reference 01) is affirmed. The employer did discharge the claimant but not for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits, if she is otherwise eligible.

Lynette A. F. Donner
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

ld/css