

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

STACEY L METZGER
Claimant

DELAWARE FAMILY MEDICINE PLC
Employer

APPEAL 15A-UI-07352-CL-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

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

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the June 26, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on July 29, 2015. Claimant did not participate. Employer participated through Clinic Office Manager Joyce Karns. Employer's Exhibit 1 was received.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed part-time as a patient service representative from August 4, 2014, and was separated from employment on June 15, 2015, when she was terminated.

Claimant was absent on June 11 and 12, 2015. Claimant properly reported the absences, stating she was unable to work due to illness. Employer has a policy requiring employees to use paid time off for absences and prohibiting more than three absent events within a six-month period. On May 12, 2015, employer put claimant on probation for one year and warned her that if she violated its policy on attendance she would be terminated. On June 11 and 12, 2015, claimant had more than three absent events in six months and had no paid time off available. Thus, employer terminated claimant on June 15 for violating its attendance policy.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 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. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. 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. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct **except for illness or other reasonable grounds** for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) (emphasis added); see *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984) holding "rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law." The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are therefore twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989).

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192. Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper* at 10. The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for "reasonable grounds," *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not "properly reported," holding excused absences are those "with appropriate notice." *Cosper* at 10. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins, supra*.

An employer's attendance policy is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for unemployment insurance benefits. A properly reported absence related to illness or injury is excused for the purpose of the Iowa Employment Security Act. Because claimant's final absences were otherwise 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.

DECISION:

The June 26, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

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Decision Dated and Mailed

cal/pjs