

I Still Don't Understand Those Sick Days!

By Gillian Vivona, 1st VP

Two years ago, working conditions changed dramatically for all of us. The life we knew of 20 days a year for illness, banking our unused days and using our sick day bank for both personal and family illness was wiped out by the stroke of a government pen.

A new world of unbanked days for only personal use and Short Term Leave entered our lives creating confusion and anxiety. Even now, two years later, calls and emails arrive almost daily with questions about, "How do the sick days work now?"

In April of 2013, the Board rolled out its program for Short-term Leave, aka SSP (because we all needed another acronym in our lives). The lack of consultation resulted in many unanswered questions and issues surrounding process and protocol. A year and half later, many have been worked through with much effort; many still remain unresolved.

I took on the SSP portfolio and it has become the primary part of my daily tasks. At any given time, we have between 60 and 85 members on SSP. From start to finish, first phone call/email to successful return to work, each member may require many hours of assistance spread over weeks and often months. It is time well spent helping our members to navigate the process of phone calls, emails, forms and overall expectations of the whole procedure. There are many rules and exceptions—sort of like English grammar!

So let's begin—how do those sick days work?

Personal Illness

Each teacher is allotted 11 sick days for personal illness use. The SEMS code for these days is code 10. These days are paid at 100% of daily salary and must be used up before SSP can be accessed.

If you are absent for 5 consecutive days within the 11 day allotment, you may be asked to provide a medical note to the Board. This request should come to you no sooner than 5 days after you return to work. The medical note you provide should simply say, "(Your name) was in my care from x date to x date" with the doctor's signature. This is to be sent by you to Chandrima Collure at the Board. It will be kept in your confidential file at the Benefits Department of the Board. **DO NOT PROVIDE THIS NOTE TO YOUR ADMINISTRATOR, SUPERINTENDENT OR SECRETARY. DO NOT SHARE ANY MEDICAL INFORMATION WITH YOUR ADMINISTRATOR, SUPERINTENDENT OR ANYONE FROM THE BOARD.**

But what happens when you use up the 11 day allotment?

Many teachers fear the end of the 11 days as they believe they will not be paid. This is not the case. When the 11 days are used up, you still call in code 10 and begin accessing your 120 day SSP allotment. What will change is how you are paid.

If you are absent one sick day at a time, spread out, you will be paid at 66.67%. Exception: if you have a chronic illness or a condition that requires periodic treatment such as migraines, for example, you can have the SSP adjudicator, Manulife, adjudicate your illness. Should they

determine “support”, the term which means that your illness has been shown to be medically supported, then you could have 2, 3, 4 or whatever number of days is determined necessary each month, to use as needed at the higher rate of pay.

If you are absent for 5 consecutive days or more, the Board will refer you to Manulife to have your absence adjudicated. You will receive a call from a Manulife case manager to inquire about your absence. Anything you tell them is confidential and may not be shared with anyone without your written consent.

You may also receive a call from someone at the Board. **DO NOT SHARE ANY MEDICAL INFORMATION WITH ANYONE WHO CALLS YOU FROM THE BOARD.** Simply tell them that you will be providing all information to the Manulife case manager. Please contact me when this happens.

If you are going to be absent for a lengthy period of time, contact me, Gillian Vivona, at TSU, 416 633 5502 and/or gvivona@tsuoecta.org for important and accurate information on the procedures and expectations for opening a Manulife file. I will walk you through the process from start to finish.

What happens to my pay when I am on SSP? If you are adjudicated support, your pay will be 90% of your daily salary rate. Exception (yes another one): If you have any unused sick days from last year, then your pay will be “topped up” to 100%--10 days at 100% for every one unused sick day. You can find out how many unused sick days you have by looking in the bottom right section of your pay stub where it identifies “Short Term Disability Top UP 10%”.

What happens if I am determined non-support? If you are determined non-support, contact me immediately so we may initiate the appeals process. I will walk you through it. **NOTE:** Despite Board actions to the contrary, the MoU does not allow for a member receiving a non-support determination to be put on zero pay. Zero pay can only be assigned when there is evidence of a culpable absence (fraud).

Family Illness/UPB Days:

Each teacher is also allotted 5 days to use for family illness and/or urgent personal business. (Urgent means important and not necessarily immediately required.) These days can be used fully for family illness (all 5) or in any combination of UPB and family illness days.

Family illness is just that. Someone in your family is ill. The code for use is code 11 and you can use all 5 days for family illness. If you use them 5 days in a row, the Board could request a doctor’s note in the same fashion as for personal illness (see above).

Urgent personal business days fall under the rules outlined on page 60 of the Collective Agreement (green cover). An urgent personal business day must fit into the categories outlined in the list provided. There are 4 in the total possible allotment. They, like all sick days, can be used as ½ days and many members use them primarily for medical specialist appointments.

To use the first two UPB days, you need to inform your principal in writing that you require the use of a UPB day under Article 23, item XX. Request that he/she insure that you have access to the code, which is 48, as this does not always happen.

To use the last two, you need to get permission from your Area Superintendent. Request use of the day(s) in full or part, in writing, and the superintendent will provide the code for you to use as long as it is in the list.

Remember: Travel is not a category for using a UPB day so if you are attending a graduation ceremony out of town, for example, your administrator cannot provide access for the travel day but only for the actual ceremony day. Please contact me for further information and clarification of this point.

Other absence days:

There is another category of days that includes bereavement, quarantine and other items like jury duty. These days **DO NOT** come out of any sick day allotment. They are a separate allotment and the rules for these days can be found on pages 61 – 64 of the Collective Agreement.

This is a lot of information—I know. But I hope that it provides you with a little more clarity around the allotment and use of sick days.

Illness, whether yours or that of someone you love, can be a scary thing. TSU cares; I care, and I am here for you. You don't have to navigate this process alone. Please, if you have any concerns or questions, do not hesitate to contact me at the number/email listed above.