

April 10, 2020

Workforce Commitments and Responsibilities During the COVID Crisis

As you all know, COVID-19 has been the challenge of our lifetimes at NYC Health + Hospitals. Our front-line staff has been stretched and challenged and have acted heroically under very difficult circumstances. We are humbled by the dedication of so many.

The COVID crisis has also created challenges for many of you at home. Children are out of school and family members may have special vulnerabilities to COVID. Some of our employees have been sick due to COVID and have needed to take time off to isolate and recover.

We have established emergency policies to help our employees best handle these challenges. We have special leave policies for COVID; we have implemented multiple safe child care arrangements; and have made hotel rooms available for staff who are concerned about working directly with COVID patients and then returning home to their families. We have also rapidly deployed additional staff – volunteers from around the country, temps, and others — to supplement the great efforts of our employees and to help handle the surge caused by this terrible crisis. Thanks to the generosity of many, we have been able to provide food in the hospitals for our workers.

However, in some places we have also identified very high rates of call outs and absences that do not appear to be consistent with patterns of COVID infection. And because all of you are critically needed in our facilities, we have to address this issue so that some of our staff is not bearing an extra burden for those who are staying home without approved leave.

As a response to this staffing emergency, we will be implementing new processes to ensure that those who are out and using sick or COVID leave are entitled to use that leave. Those who cannot document illnesses through a doctor's note or OHS authorization— a positive COVID test result is not required in the first 7 calendar days —will be coded for leave without pay unless annual leave has been approved or special leave authorizations, like FMLA or EEO, have been obtained. This change is required because every member of our staff is essential to this COVID response.

Employees will have 5 calendar days to provide documentation of sick or COVID leave, but it will have to cover all days of sick or COVID leave.

Documentation could come from an OHS consultation, a test result, a doctor's note outlining symptoms. Telehealth visits are encouraged for doctor's notes.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and dedication to our mission during this crisis.

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