

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

ASSISTING EMPLOYEES WITH LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS

Washoe County recognizes that employees with life-threatening illnesses including but not limited to cancer, heart disease, and AIDS may wish to continue to engage in as many of their normal pursuits as their condition allows, including work. As long as these employees are able to meet acceptable performance standards, and medical evidence indicates that their conditions are not a threat to themselves or others, managers should be sensitive to their conditions and ensure that they are treated consistently with other employees. At the same time, Washoe County has an obligation to provide a safe work environment for all employees as well as the public. Every precaution should be taken to ensure that an employee's condition does not present a health and/or safety threat to other employees or the public.

Consistent with this concern for employees with life-threatening illness, Washoe County offers the following range of resources available through the Department of Human Resources and/or the County's EAP provider.

Management and employee education and information on terminal illness and specific life-threatening illness.

Referral to agencies and organizations which offer supportive services for life-threatening illnesses.

Benefit consultation to assist employees in effectively managing health, leave, and other benefits.

Guidelines

When dealing with situations involving employees with life threatening illnesses, managers should:

1. Remember that an employee's health, condition is personal and confidential and reasonable precautions should be taken to protect information regarding an employee's health condition. In certain cases it is a violation of NRS to reveal any information without the written consent of the employee. These include AIDS, ARC, and any sexually transmitted disease (STD).
2. Contact the Department of Human Resources if you believe that you or other employees need information about terminal illness, or a specific life-threatening illness, or if you need further guidance in managing a situation that involves an employee with a life-threatening illness.
3. Contact the Department of Human Resources if you have any concern about the possible contagious nature of an employee's illness. Human Resources will advise you accordingly.
4. Contact the Department of Human Resources to determine if a statement should be obtained from the employee's attending physician that continued presence at work will pose no threat to co-workers or the public. Washoe County can consult with specialist physicians in regard to any particular illness which an employee may have and may take steps to exclude the employee from the workplace if it is determined by the consulting physician that the employee's continued presence at work may pose such a threat to co-workers or the public.
5. If warranted, make reasonable accommodations for employees with life-threatening illnesses consistent with the business needs of the division/unit.

6. Make reasonable attempts to transfer employees with life-threatening illnesses who request a transfer and are experiencing undue emotional stress.
7. Be sensitive and responsive to co-workers' concerns, add emphasize employee education through the Department of Human Resources and/or the EAP provider.
8. No special consideration should be given beyond normal transfer requests for employees who feel threatened by a co-worker's life-threatening illness.
9. Be sensitive that continued employment for an employee with a life-threatening illness may sometimes be therapeutically important in the remission or recovery process, or may help to prolong that employee's life.
10. Employees should be encouraged to seek assistance from established community support groups for medical treatment and counseling services through the County's EAP provider. Information on these can be requested through Human Resources.