

Crisis leave policy may be implemented systemwide

By ERIN GIBSON
Senior Reporter

In 1995, a sudden illness or family crisis could cost a University of Nebraska-Lincoln employee thousands of dollars.

After exhausting limited vacation days and sick leave, the employee—even if suffering from a life-threatening illness or caring for a dying relative—would take unpaid time off work.

University employers said they felt powerless and heartless, but they could do little to help a struggling employee financially.

Now a UNL policy saves employees from the financial penalties of a family or personal crisis, university officials said.

Bruce Currin, human resources director, said the UNL Crisis Leave Sharing Policy took effect as a pilot program Jan. 1, 1996, and allows employees to donate up to three paid vacation days to a crisis leave pool. Other employees can then apply to receive excess paid vacation days from the pool in times of crisis.

As a result, workers feel their personal crisis is less of a burden. The policy also raises employee morale and helps UNL recruit and retain quality faculty and staff, he said.

The policy's cost to the university is negligible, he said.

These results have led Currin to call the program's pilot stage "a tremendous success."

This weekend, the NU Board of Regents approved the program. The director of personnel services at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, which has no crisis leave program.

"If a person is sick and has no sick leave, they go on leave without pay," Oberle said. "So they have no money coming in at a time when they proba-

bly need it most.

"If you sit in the chair that I'm sitting in and see the problems that occur from time to time on campus," Oberle said with a heavy voice.

He paused.

"There's very little that we've been able to do in the past to help them out," he said.

Now UNO can only help an employee find emergency loans, he said. If regents approve the crisis leave policy, UNO would be able to offer employees more help in times of need, he said.

During the first 18 months of the crisis leave program at UNL, 362 employees offered to help colleagues in crisis.

Employees donated 939 vacation days to the crisis leave pool. Employees in 49 crisis situations requested 554 of the donated days, Currin said.

The majority of those donating days were men, but the majority of those requesting days were women, he said.

NU Central Administration estimates employees systemwide would donate about 1,500 days and would request about 900 days each year under the crisis leave policy.

Although more days would be donated than requested, administrators estimate the program could cost the university up to \$50,000 annually.

John Russell, NU director of human resources and associate vice chancellor for business and finance, said administrative costs would total only pennies. A computer program would track the number of crisis leave days donated and requested, he said.

The program's cost arises from the university paying another employee to complete the job of a colleague on crisis leave.

But Currin said the program would financially benefit the university because more days are donated than requested.

Regents also should consider the value of the program to employees in crisis situations and the value to the university as a recruiting and retention tool, he said.

"More and more employers are becoming family friendly," Currin said, including many of the university's peer institutions.

Many of these institutions and the state of Nebraska already have similar crisis leave programs, which recognize the importance of family emergencies among employees, he said.

Russell said the university can no longer lag behind this change in workplace culture.

When looking to recruit talented new faculty and staff, potential employees will notice whether the university maintains family friendly work policies, he said.

The policy "sets a tone, and it sets a climate," Currin said. "It makes a statement about what we value."

Wes Sime, UNL professor of health and human relations, said this statement of values can mark a healthy workplace—one where employees share a sense of community by giving of themselves to help others.

But, if the university adopts this policy systemwide, it should consider more strongly supporting those who donate time through accolades in their departments and on a university level, he said.

Sime suggested the chancellor could hold a luncheon to thank those donating, because they've improved the health of UNL's workplace.

If a sense of camaraderie develops among those who donate days, the program will find greater success, he said.

"To allow this kind of community spirit, without much cost to the university, it is an extremely beneficial policy," Sime said.

Oberle said he agreed.

"When we help out the employee, we help out the university."

Smokeout breaks unhealthy habits

By SARAH BAKER
Assignment Reporter

If his plan comes through, the cigarette Kent Fullman was smoking Wednesday afternoon may be one of his last.

"I have given quitting some serious thought recently," he said. "I spent about \$40 bucks today and bought some Nicorette gum, and I think I'm going to give it a try."

Fullman, who works for his family business in Lincoln, said today's Great American Smokeout was one thing that inspired him to think about quitting again.

"I quit smoking last January, but then April came around and I had to do my taxes," Fullman said. "I ended up going out and buying a pack of cigarettes."

The Great American Smokeout, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, is a national annual event that promotes quitting tobacco habits, including cigarettes, cigars, chew and snuff.

Julie Rezac, assistant health aide coordinator at the University Health Center, said the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's second-year health aides are planning activities centered on the event.

Rezac said the health center will have a booth in the Nebraska Union from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

"We will have brochures, posters and also a lung machine that shows the effects of smoking on the body," she said.

Another smoker outside of the Nebraska Union Wednesday said she was going to try to give up the habit.

Genni Wallace, a temp worker in Student Involvement and a freshman French education major, said she is considering quitting.

"I don't know if I will quit tomorrow, but I will quit before second semester," Wallace said. "I wholeheartedly support the Great American Smokeout."

Rezac also said the health aides are sponsoring an adopt-a-smoker program for the week of the Smokeout.

"The aides work with smokers on ways to quit," she said. "Their ultimate goal is to help them stop smoking forever."

Curtis Biggs, a second-year health aide in Neihardt Residence Hall, said the aides do everything in their power to help the smokers

quit for the day.

"We give them food and candy to help them quit, and remind them there are only 24 hours in one day," Biggs said. "We give them praise for having the willpower to quit."

Biggs said the booth in the Nebraska Union was successful Wednesday.

"A lot of people stopped by and I think we were really effective in presenting the information," Biggs said. "We want to do as much as we can to help people learn about smoking."

Mary Lutz, a staff physician at the health center, said smoking causes many short-term side effects.

"Smoking causes bad breath, chronic coughing, yellowing of teeth and a smoky smell on the person, and those are just the short-term effects," Lutz said. "Chewing causes those same effects but also includes the possibility of sores on both the mouth and gums."

Lutz also said the long-term effects of smoking can cause other diseases besides cancer or emphysema.

"Heart disease is the No. 1 killer in the United States, and nicotine has an effect on that," she said.

Carol Ash, health promotions and marketing specialist at the health center, said the main goal of the activities is awareness.

"We want UNL students to seriously consider quitting the habit," Ash said.

Ash said that at first glance, the number of UNL students who are smokers may look grim, but it is actually not too bad.

Out of the entire UNL student body, 19 percent of the students smoke, but that leaves 81 percent of students who don't smoke.

"There might be an image on campus that everybody is doing it, but in reality they aren't," Ash said.

Ash said the health center is also looking into sponsoring a new program called Fresh Start to further help students quit the habit.

"If students are interested in the Great American Smokeout activities and want to get into another program to help them quit, this is a great opportunity," Ash said.

Ash said any students who are interested in quitting or being a facilitator for the program can call the Community Health Education Center at (402) 472-7440.



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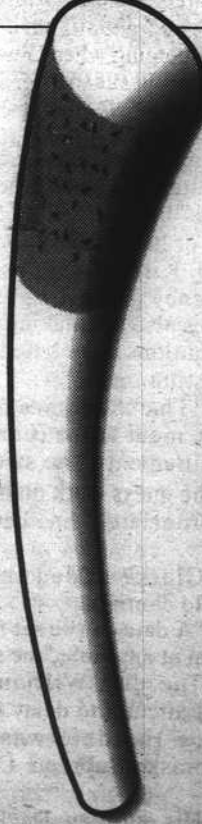
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 - Carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal
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- 24 hours after quitting**
 - Chances of heart attack decrease
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- Two weeks to three months after quitting**
 - Circulation improves
 - Walking becomes easier
 - Lung function increases up to 30 percent
- One to nine months after quitting**
 - Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, shortness of breath decrease
 - Cilia regain normal function in lungs, increasing ability to handle mucus, clean the lungs and reduce infection
 - Overall energy increases
- One year after quitting**
 - Excess risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker
- Five years after quitting**
 - Stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker five to 15 years after quitting
- 10 years after quitting**
 - Lung cancer death rate about half that of a continuing smoker's
 - Precancerous cells are replaced
 - Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney and pancreas decreases
- 15 years after quitting**
 - Risk of coronary heart disease is that of a nonsmoker

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AARON STECKELBERG/DN