

The Benefits of Saving Sick Leave

By Joel Guzzo, Customer Support Office-New Cumberland

As federal civilian employees, we receive a great benefit in the form of sick leave that costs us absolutely nothing. Each pay period, full-time employees earn four hours of sick leave, and there is no limit on the amount that we can accumulate.

Sick leave has traditionally been available to us when we are incapacitated for duty, as well as for medical, dental, or optical examinations and treatments. In the 1990's, the use of sick leave was expanded to include routine care of family members, as well as making funeral arrangements or attending the funeral of a family member. Full-time employees can now use up to 40 hours of sick leave each leave year for these family-related purposes. And, if we maintain a sick leave balance of 80 hours, we can use up to an additional 64 hours of sick leave. This benefit also applies to part-time employees; however, the amount permitted for family care and bereavement is pro-rated in proportion to the average number of work hours in the employee's scheduled weekly tour of duty.

In addition to all this, the Family Medical Leave Act also allows us to use up to 12 workweeks of sick leave each leave year to care for a family member with a serious health condition. However, any sick leave previously used for family care or bereavement during the leave year is included in this 12-week period.

While most of us are in good health now and we hope to stay that way, illnesses and injuries frequently do happen to us and our family members. Steve Carney of DLA's Customer Support Office—New Cumberland (CSO-N) was only 32 years old when he had a stroke

that kept him away from work for six months. "I was very glad that I saved my sick leave," said Carney. "It happened so suddenly—one minute I was sitting in an Organizational Behavior class at PSU (Penn State University), and the next thing I knew I was in the hospital.

Carney said he sees sick leave as an insurance policy. "Maybe you'll never get to use it, but it is there just in case." By

using sick leave prudently and maintaining a steadily increasing balance, we can continue to receive our full pay if an extended period of incapacitation or family care needs occur.

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As with all leave, the process of taking leave starts with consulting your supervisor to discuss your situation.

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