

# return to work principles



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Return to Work Principles .....	3
Overview of Responsibilities.....	4
» Employee: Your Responsibilities .....	4
» Manager: Your Responsibilities .....	4
» Disability Benefits Specialist Responsibilities.....	5
» Occupational Health Nurse Responsibilities .....	6
Responsibilities for Specific Absences .....	7
» Absence Due to Workplace Issues/Stress.....	7
» Absence due to Substance Abuse.....	8
» Absence due to Workplace Illness/Injury .....	9
Dispute Resolution.....	11
Waterloo Resources.....	11

# principles

UWaterloo is committed to making every reasonable effort to enable employees to remain in the workplace and/or to ensure a safe, early return after illness/injury.

The University of Waterloo and its employees are committed to co-operating and participating in the Return to Work (RTW) Program. This approach is consistent with the views of the Ontario Medical Association, and is compliant with legislation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, Ontario Human Rights Code and Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The Ontario Medical Association has stated: "Prolonged absence from one's normal roles including absence from the workplace, is detrimental to a person's mental, physical and social wellbeing".

Our RTW Program strives to provide accommodation for an employee who is temporarily or permanently unable to return to their duties as a result of an illness/injury. The program provides opportunities to perform the regular job with modifications, or when available, to perform alternate temporary work that meets the injured employee's functional abilities.

The RTW Program applies to all employees of the University. It will be a collaborative and outcome-based process to assess, plan, implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the options and services required to meet an individual's needs. The RTW Program will utilize a case management approach for achieving an outcome for an ill/injured employee.

The manager/department head and the employee have a **shared responsibility** for getting the employee back to work as soon as he/she is able to do so and for making the employee's return to work a success as soon as it is healthy and safe to do so. The Disability Management Team, comprised of the Disability Benefits Specialist, Occupational Health Nurses, and Safety/WSIB Officer (in cases of workplace injuries), also plays a part in supporting this process.

Many employees who have been absent due to illness/injury return to work to their full-time regular duties; however others may require a gradual return to regular duties and hours. The Return to Work Program uses outcome-based practices to meet an individual's needs, with a goal of having the employee reach full duties and hours, normally within a 6-8 week period.

If an employee needs to be absent, documentation must be provided for an absence of five (5) consecutive working days. For more information, please refer to the Disability Management Guide, which can be found on the [Human Resources website](#) under Absences from Work.

# overview of responsibilities

## » EMPLOYEE: YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the employee to actively engage in the return to work process:

- » Be available for phone calls/meeting requests by the Disability Management Team (unless alternative arrangements have been made). Unfortunately, failure to do so places your sick leave benefits at risk and they may be suspended.
- » Maintain regular contact with his/her manager/supervisor regarding the possible return to work date, which may include modified work and/or other accommodations, unless otherwise arranged by the Disability Management Team.
- » Inform his/her doctor that early and safe return to work opportunities are available to accommodate your functional abilities.
- » Provide the Disability Benefits Specialist (for staff) or Occupational Health Nurse (for faculty) with sick leave documentation, as outlined in the Disability Management Guide (which can be found on the [Human Resources website](#) under Absences from Work).
- » Contribute to the development of a suitable Return to Work (RTW) plan.
- » Participate in facilitated discussions leading to a safe, early return to work in a timely manner. Failure to participate in the process places your sick leave benefits at risk and they may be suspended.
- » Report any concerns with his/her return to work to your supervisor and Disability Benefits Specialist or Occupational Health Nurse.
- » Consult with Waterloo Resources, as needed.

## » MANAGER: YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the supervisor/manager/department head to actively engage in the return to work process:

- » Provide a safe work environment.
- » Notify Disability Benefits Specialist of absences which are five consecutive days or longer or pattern absences.
- » Maintain regular contact with the Disability Benefits Specialist.

- » As a manager, you are **not** entitled to your employee’s medical information. If the employee shares any medical information, you must maintain the confidentiality of that medical information and forward any medical forms received directly to the Disability Benefits Specialist (for staff) or to the Occupational Health Nurse (for faculty).
- » Identify and discuss work options that lead to a safe and early return to work, which may include modified work/hours.
- » Facilitate and promote a supportive return to work environment including the employee’s co-workers.
- » Monitor the progress of the employee, meet with him/her regularly to ensure the return to work plan is progressing towards a successful, safe return.
- » Consult with the Disability Management Team as needed.

**NOTE:**

In some situations, a performance issue may be present. In these situations the manager is expected to address performance issues with the employee using progressive, corrective actions in a timely manner in consultation with their Human Resources Partner.

## **»» DISABILITY BENEFITS SPECIALIST RESPONSIBILITIES**

It is the responsibility of the Disability Benefits Specialist to:

- » Maintain regular contact with the employee and the manager regarding receipt of documentation, progress and return to work information.
- » Maintain the confidentiality of the employee’s medical information.
- » Ensure the employee is aware of sick leave/LTD benefits and processes, including providing any necessary documentation as required.
- » Assist in coordinating a safe, early return to work by working with the employee, manager/supervisor, Human Resources Partner (if required), and Disability Management Team.
- » Support and monitor the return of the employee to his/her department with any required accommodation of duties/hours.

# RESPONSIBILITY

## » OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSE RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the Occupational Health Nurse to:

- » Maintain regular contact with the employee regarding his/her health condition.
- » Attend Return to Work discussions with the employee to provide support.
- » Maintain the confidentiality of the employee's medical information, including clarifying health information through the employee's health care providers when indicated.
- » Evaluate, in consultation with the employee's health care providers when necessary, the employee's readiness to return to work and clarifying functional abilities.
- » Refer the employee to Waterloo Resources, as needed, and recommend appropriate off campus resources.
- » Assist in co-ordinating a safe, early return to work by working with the employee, manager/supervisor/chair, Human Resources Partner (if required), and Disability Management Team.
- » Advise Disability Benefits Specialist and Human Resources Partner if subsequent investigation does not find the delayed return to work and/or lack of communication is justified.

# responsibilities for specific absences

The rest of this document specifies roles and responsibilities for all concerned when an employee may be off work due to workplace issues/stress, substance abuse or workplace illness/injury.

## »» ABSENCE DUE TO WORKPLACE ISSUES/STRESS

In cases where workplace issues/stress is contributing to an employee's absence, sick leave is payable when there is identifiable, verifiable medical evidence of illness/injury. The employee or manager must contact their Human Resources Partner, when appropriate and as early as is medically possible, to discuss the workplace issues and to begin the facilitated return to work process. During these discussions, the Occupational Health Nurse will provide medical clarification/guidance and support. CUPE 793, Faculty or Staff Associations may be involved if the member wants their support.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the general Occupational Health Nurse responsibilities noted above, it is the responsibility of the **Occupational Health Nurse** to:

- » Refer the employee to their Human Resources Partner to discuss the workplace issue.
- » Actively participate in the discussions of the causes and possible solutions to the workplace stress.

In workplace issues/stress situations, the **Human Resources Partner** has the responsibility to:

- » Meet with the employee and manager/department head individually prior to the facilitated discussion in order to understand each of their concerns and outline the expected goals of the facilitated discussion. In this meeting, the Human Resources Partner's role is that of the mediator.
- » Facilitate the discussion regarding the causes and possible solutions to this workplace stress among the employee, manager and Occupational Health Nurse (and CUPE 793, Staff or Faculty Associations if requested by the employee).

# SPECIFIC ABSENCES

## »» ABSENCE DUE TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE

All Waterloo employees are expected to **not** be impaired by alcohol, illicit drugs and/or prescription drugs at the workplace, or while otherwise performing Waterloo job responsibilities.

In cases where **substance abuse** — which includes alcohol, illicit drugs, and or prescription drugs, is identified, sick leave will be paid as long as the employee provides verifiable medical evidence showing that he/she is actively engaged in treatment for resolving this illness. If the illness is self-reported and the employee is requesting help, the same expectations will apply. Each situation will be individually assessed.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the general employee responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **employee** to:

- » Be actively engaged in treatment for the substance abuse.
- » Not be impaired by alcohol, illicit drugs and/or prescription drugs at the workplace, or while otherwise performing job responsibilities.
- » Work with Occupational Health for support, as needed.

In addition to the general manager responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **manager/department head** to:

- » When there is reasonable suspicion of impairment in the workplace, the manager/department head will send the employee home with safe transportation and advise their Human Resources Partner.
- » A meeting with the employee, the Human Resources Partner, and manager should occur as soon as possible after the incident to address the employee's behavior.

In addition to the general Disability Benefits Specialist responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **Disability Benefits Specialist** to:

- » Refer the employee to the Occupational Health Nurse to provide help for any substance abuse/addiction.
- » Ensure that the employee is aware of his/her responsibility to provide verifiable medical documentation indicating active participation in treatment for the substance abuse.

In addition to the general Occupational Health Nurse responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **Occupational Health Nurse** to:

- » When/if an employee chooses to voluntarily disclose that he/she has a problem related to substance abuse, the Occupational Health Nurse will refer the employee to appropriate care for substance abuse/addictions with off campus community resources.



- » Provide the employee with information regarding treatment options available.
- » Support the employee during the transition back into the workplace and provide ongoing support to the employee as they continue to achieve/maintain wellness.
- » If Occupational Health Nurse is aware of continued concerns, the employee can be referred to their caregiver.

## » ABSENCE DUE TO WORKPLACE ILLNESS/INJURY

In cases where **workplace illness/injury** is the reason for the employee's absence or medical aid/healthcare, a claim is filed with the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB) and benefits are determined by the Board. Return to Work Policies of the WSIB **must** be adhered to.

Sick leave is payable as advances on WSIB benefits when there is identifiable, verifiable medical evidence of illness/injury.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the general employee responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **employee** to actively engage in the return to work process, which includes:

- » Know and follow safety policies and procedures.
- » Report any workplace incident, injury/illness to his/her supervisor immediately.
- » Provide the Safety/WSIB Officer with **functional** abilities information from the health care provider, supporting absence from work.

In addition to the general manager responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **manager/department head** to:

- » Report any workplace incident/injury to the Safety/WSIB Officer.

It is the responsibility of the **Safety/WSIB Officer** to:

- » Maintain regular contact with the employee regarding his/her health condition.
- » Maintain the confidentiality of the employee's medical information.
- » Determine availability and suitability of accommodation with respect to the employee's functional abilities.
- » Coordinate and facilitate return to work process involving the employee, manager/supervisor, Disability Benefits Specialist and Occupational Health Nurse, in accordance with WSIB Early & Safe Return to Work Policy.

# SPECIFIC ABSENCES

- » Manage the employee's **WSIB claim** documentation/file and document all activities and responsibilities in the return to work case and oversee the administration of the return to work program.
- » Monitor the progress of the return to work case and advise all involved of any changes to wages, duration or duties of the plan and closure of the plan.
- » Communicate relevant information including return to work status to the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board, Disability Benefits Specialist and Occupational Health Nurse.
- » Maintain regular contact with Disability Benefits Specialist regarding sick leave and LTD benefit status.

In addition to the general Disability Benefits Specialist responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **Disability Benefits Specialist** to:

- » Maintain regular contact with the Safety/WSIB Officer regarding progress and possible return to work date.
- » Ensure the employee is aware of sick leave/LTD benefits integrate with WSIB.
- » Ensure the employee is provided with the LTD application forms if/when required.
- » Co-ordinate a safe, early return to work by working with the employee, manager/supervisor, WSIB Safety Officer and Occupational Health Nurse.

In addition to the general Occupational Health Nurse responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the **Occupational Health Nurse** to:

- » Maintain regular contact with the Safety/WSIB Officer regarding the injured workers health condition.
- » Work with the employee, manager/supervisor, WSIB Safety Officer and Disability Officer to support a safe, early return to work.
- » Support the return of the employee to his/her department with any required accommodation of duties/hours.

# dispute resolution

In situations where there is an issue in dispute related to either the RTW process or the suitability of the RTW plan, and where a meeting with the worker (and employee/union rep if applicable) did not resolve the dispute, the Safety/WSIB Officer will make a referral to the WSIB when the dispute involves cooperation in return to work or suitability of the job accommodation.

# Waterloo resources

The following Resources are available for all employees and managers/department heads to support the return to work process. All contacts will be treated with respect and confidentiality. Medical information is only released with a signed consent from the employee.

- » Campus Wellness, Occupational Health, ext. 40538
- » Human Resources, Disability Benefits Specialist, ext. 42926
- » Human Resources, Human Resources Partner (for your area)
- » Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, ext. 43765
- » AccessAbility Services, ext. 45082
- » Safety Officer, ext. 36359
- » Staff Association, ext. 48668
- » Faculty Association, ext. 33787
- » CUPE 793 Union, ext. 36793

The University of Waterloo gathers and maintains information used on this form for the purposes of supporting the University's income continuance programs. Information will be protected, used, and released in compliance with applicable law, including but not limited to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, RSO 1990, c F.31, Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (S.O. 1997, c.16) and Occupational Health and Safety Act (R.S.O. 1991, c.0.1) and UWaterloo Policies. Questions about the collection, use and disclosure of information on this form should be directed to the Disability Benefits Specialist, University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1



**DISABILITY BENEFITS SPECIALIST**

**Nellie Gomes**, Human Resources, ext. 42926

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES**

**Karen Parkinson**, Occupational Health, ext. 40538

**Cassie Hunter**, Occupational Health, ext. 40551

**SAFETY/WSIB OFFICER**

**Andrew Scheifele**, Safety Office, ext. 36359



UNIVERSITY OF  
**WATERLOO**