



Corrections Sick Leave Abuse: Trends, Technology, and Solutions

Using technology and policy changes
to reduce sick leave abuse in corrections

This report produced in partnership with:



Trends

Staffing in a correctional setting is crucial; certain posts within a prison, such as those overseeing inmates, cannot be left unfilled. If someone calls in sick, other personnel are placed into an overtime shift due to last-minute scheduling changes. Abuse of sick leave in a correctional setting can put tired officers into positions that leave them, inmates, and the public at risk.

It also affects the bottom line and morale.

Corrections1 recently conducted a reader survey on the misuse of paid sick leave in a correctional setting. The collective response made it clear that line staff members are worried about the abuse of sick leave in their facilities.

Sick leave abuse always affected morale in the department, and when the abuse became public knowledge, the trust of communities and municipal decision makers was lost.

The Corrections1 survey found that 45% of correctional officers were very concerned about sick leave abuse in their departments, with another 38% moderately concerned. Sixty-one percent reported sick leave abuse occurring within the past six months.

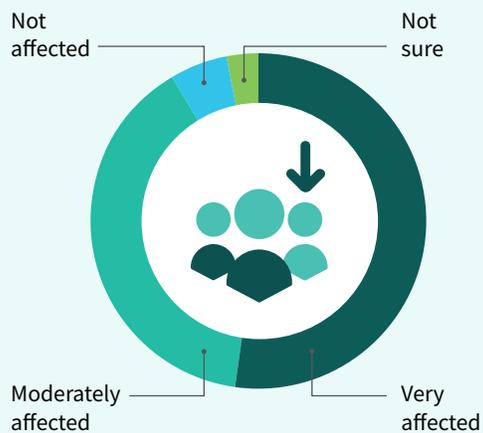
Most attributed the increase in sick leave abuse to employee entitlement, but included other factors such as sick leave being poorly monitored by supervisors and that their agency had a liberal sick leave policy.

Almost 40% of respondents reported that their departments incurred nonbudget overtime costs ranging from \$300,000 to \$600,000 to cover vacancies caused by unnecessary use of sick leave.

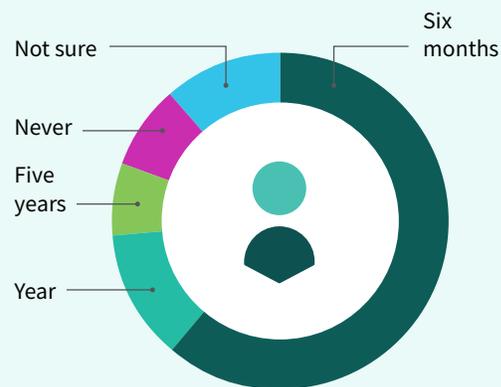
In addition, an overwhelming number of respondents reported that sick leave abuse always affected morale in the department, and that when the abuse became public knowledge, the trust of communities and municipal decision makers was lost.

Around 47% of officers reported that their facilities did not use an absence management software program, and another 31% said they were unsure.

To what degree are staffing levels affected in your operations due to unnecessary sick leave?



Have you caught an employee abusing sick leave in the past:



How to use software to reduce sick leave abuse in corrections facilities

Challenges

Many corrections facilities use Excel spreadsheets for scheduling, which makes it difficult not only to schedule a few weeks at a time but also difficult to ensure an appropriate number of officers are on hand during a given shift.

It isn't uncommon for officers who call in sick on the day of their shift to be given the time off because administrators are unsure how many sick days that particular officer has remaining. This often forces other officers who were already present for a shift that day to be required to stick around to fill vacated shifts, which causes a major drop in morale. It also hits a facility's overtime and sick leave budgets hard, potentially pushing operations into the red.

Solutions

To help solve the problem, corrections facilities across the U.S. and Canada have installed the UKG TeleStaff™ scheduling system, which tracks employee staffing and provides data analytics to administrators for a big-picture view.

With UKG TeleStaff, administrators can build sick leave policies directly into the system, so when officers attempt to request time off, they're required to ask for approval. Administrators can then use the system's reporting tools to view how much time off a particular officer has taken and then make an informed decision about whether that officer should be allowed to skip an assigned shift, said Steven Westermire, a UKG consultant.

The UKG TeleStaff system also enables administrators to better track financials and have a visual representation in the form of a graph that shows where they stand within a quarter, Westermire added. This helps agencies track labor costs and see the effect sick leave abuse is having on their operations and bottom line.

Results

Correctional administrators are now able to ensure that each shift is appropriately staffed for maximum security and productivity, Westermire said. When an officer requests time off at the last minute and either has a valid reason or is entitled to it, administrators can use the system to find a viable candidate who has the overtime available and has not worked a shift that day. This helps ensure those who are on staff aren't fatigued or working under undue stress.

With the ability to review labor cost reports, corrections administrators can now better manage budgets related to sick leave and overtime.

Conclusion

Sick leave abuse is still an issue facing corrections administrators. The UKG TeleStaff system can help administrators solve the problem by evenly applying sick leave policies, managing overtime usage, and improving staff morale through communication and consistency across an agency. The use of technology in corrections shows that sick leave abuse can be quickly reduced, thereby saving facilities money while boosting morale and trust among staff and constituents.



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