

Presenteeism in the Workplace

by Kathleen Ladislaus

Do you go to work sick or injured, when you should stay home and recover? Is it because you are so passionate about your work? Is it a sense of loyalty to the employer or, are you fearful to miss a day at work because there is an enforced, attendance management policy in place?

Enjoying one's chosen profession is wonderful, everyone should feel good about the work they do. Loyalty is also commendable, however, if you are injured, ill or experiencing physical or mental illness, you may be doing harm to yourself or others by going to work.

Presenteeism, the opposite of absenteeism, is a workforce issue that has received little, or no attention. Several studies have shown costs to work productivity, error rates and even financial costs to the employer are significant with presenteeism.

From a health and safety perspective, it is irresponsible to go to work sick and spread illness on to co-workers or the general public. Some of your co-workers may have compromised immune systems or take the illness home to others more vulnerable, with dire consequences. The recent measles outbreak is a good example of how a dangerous, infectious virus can spread to vulnerable members in society, babies and children not fully vaccinated.

According to WorkSafe BC, it is law, an employer protect workers from all work-related hazards, including exposure to infectious diseases (Workers Compensation Act, Division 3, Section 115). A responsible employer will encourage workers to stay home and set standards in place with supervisors and managers to send home, anyone showing up to work presenting signs of illness.

Many workers do not have paid sick leave and due to financial considerations, go to work regardless of their physical or mental well-being. This is a serious issue for consideration. How do we remedy the situation of the Auxiliary Worker and their financial vulnerability when they are sick or injured?

A recent survey completed by CUPE 454 Members revealed 59% go to work sick or injured due the attendance management policy currently in place.