

VOLUNTARY MEDICAL LEAVE FOR NON-BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES

PURPOSE: To define the process for a voluntary medical leave, as well as the procedure for returning the student to Mercyhurst University following such an absence.

POLICY: Mercyhurst University may permit a student to take an approved, voluntary medical leave when a student:

- Experiences symptoms of a medical illness or injury that significantly disrupt daily life functioning, including class attendance and progress, to an extent that it is not possible for the student to succeed academically for the term.
- The nature of the illness or injury is such that reasonable accommodations will not permit the student to be successful during the term.

The recommendation for medical leave for non-behavioral health issues must come from the licensed treating physician following an evaluation of the client. While such a recommendation could come from a physician providing services through the Mercyhurst University Cohen Student Health Center, frequently such recommendations come from the student's physician(s) in the home community.

The request for medical leave typically is first directed by the student to the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The leave request is then forwarded to the Director of the Cohen Student Health Center for review. Depending on the nature of the illness/injury, the Director may also request a review from the Medical Director of the Center, or request further information from the treating physician or student. The Director of the Center will then forward a recommendation whether to approve the leave, or will raise concerns or reservations with OAA about the request. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, or the individual's designee, makes the final decision regarding granting a medical leave.

If approved for medical leave, the student's transcript will show that the student withdrew from classes, the GPA is not affected, and the nature of the leave is not displayed. Refunds of tuition and/or housing dollars are dependent on the date the leave is initiated and follow the timelines published in the student catalogue for refunds. The one exception to this is if the medical leave is granted for a catastrophic illness or injury in which case the full tuition and housing fees for the term are refunded to the student. In this instance, the cease enrollment will be dated based on the date the student initiates the leave process. The financial refund will be manually processed pending the approval of the Vice President of Enrollment. The recommendation for catastrophic illness will be made by the Director of the Health Center in consultation with the Medical Leave Committee.

Students on medical leave are not permitted to register for classes until a return from leave has been approved. This is accomplished by OAA placing a medical hold on the student's account. A student taking medical leave for non-psychiatric issues is required to provide a letter from the treating physician clearing the student to return to classes. This letter will be sent to the Office of Academic Affairs,

forwarded to the Director of the Cohen Student Health Center for review and approval and sent back to OAA for processing. At that time, the hold is removed from the student's account to clear the way for registration.

In some instances, a physician may recommend the student return to campus with accommodations. In this event, the request for accommodations will be reviewed by the Cohen Student Health Center and Learning Differences Office and an accommodation plan developed by the latter and communicated to faculty.

PROCEDURE

REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

1. The student must provide a letter to OAA from a treating licensed physician that supports the need for medical leave and provides medical rationale.
2. In most instances, a student with an illness or injury requiring a leave is already being treated in their home community. However, regardless of whether the initial referral comes from the Cohen Student Health Center or a community physician, the provider is asked to document the symptoms/treatment requirements that will interfere with the student's academic functioning to the degree that a leave should be granted. A referral form and information on medical leaves can be provided by the Health Center to the physician as indicated.
3. A student desiring a leave will sign a release of information that permits the physician recommending the leave to share confidential health information. The release form should specifically designate Mercyhurst University Office of Academic Affairs and Cohen Student Health Center.
4. Medical leaves are generally appropriate in medical situations that require the student to miss a significant amount of classes during the term. For example, students who must miss two or more consecutive weeks of school, and are not able during that time to keep up with classes because of their medical condition, often will benefit from a leave.
5. If accommodations can prevent the need for taking a medical leave, these accommodations will be discussed with the physician, and the Learning Differences office involved to help develop an accommodation plan.

MEDICAL LEAVE RECOMMENDED AND ACCEPTED

1. If a medical leave is recommended and accepted by the student, and the student is on campus and involved with the Cohen Student Health Center, the student will be asked to sign a release of information permitting the Center to contact Residence Life/Student Life and the Office of Academic Affairs. The student will be encouraged to contact the parent(s) regarding the leave recommendation and to permit Health Center staff to help address parent questions about the leave. A written release signed by the student must be in place for the Health Center staff to talk with the parents.

2. The Health Center Director or designee will alert the Resident Life Assistant Director that a medical leave is being pursued, and will remind the student of the process for checking out of campus housing.
3. The student/family will be encouraged to discuss any housing or financial concerns with the relevant campus offices.
4. The Director of the Health Center will provide an official written recommendation to the Office of Academic Affairs so that OAA may approve the leave. All privileged healthcare information will be maintained by OAA in a locked and confidential file.
5. If a request for medical leave is made to OAA by the student, family, or physician, OAA will request the appropriate medical documentation which can then be forwarded to the Director of Cohen Student Health Center.
6. The recommendation will be reviewed, and provided the student has a written release in place, the Director will contact the physician as needed for additional information. The Director will communicate a final recommendation to OAA for approval.
7. OAA will send the student a letter indicating that the leave has been approved, and advising the student to stay in touch with Financial Aid and Residence Life during the leave period as questions arise.
8. OAA will send an email notifying the student's faculty that the student is taking a medical leave. This communication will not include any information regarding the reason for such a leave beyond the fact that it is medical.
9. OAA will assist families that have questions about the impact of a leave on financial aid and will direct them to other parties as appropriate.
10. OAA will contact financial aid as indicated to arrange for refunds provided the leave date falls within the period in which refunds are provided. Similarly, OAA will notify financial aid in the event the medical leave is of a catastrophic nature and qualifies for a full refund.

MEDICAL LEAVE RECOMMENDED, BUT STUDENT DECLINES

1. In some circumstances, a student's health issue may pose an immediate safety risk for their physical safety or that of others on campus. In this instance, if a medical leave is recommended but refused, the Health Center Director will contact the Vice President of Student Life to make them aware of the situation, and to determine if any criteria for an involuntary medical leave are present. If so, an involuntary medical leave may be pursued. If not, Health Center staff will work to keep an active treatment relationship with the student and will utilize other campus supports as possible, revisiting the issue of a voluntary leave as indicated.
2. In some instances, a student may be required by the school to obtain a medical evaluation to demonstrate their ability to safely be on the campus.
3. Examples of these situations may include a student with active and contagious tuberculosis who refuses treatment; a student with severe anorexia and evidence of health failure; a student with uncontrolled grand mal seizures who refuses all medications.

MEDICAL LEAVE REQUESTED, BUT EVALUATION RESULTS DO NOT SUPPORT

1. If a student requests a medical leave, but there is not clinical support for such a leave, the student will be so informed. If a student does not qualify for a voluntary medical leave, the student may still be able to cease enrollment, and the student will be referred to the Office of Academic Affairs for more information.

RETURN FROM MEDICAL LEAVE

1. A student desiring to return from medical leave should obtain a letter from the treating, licensed physician that documents that the student is ready to return to campus at the start of the next term. This letter should be sent to the Office of Academic Affairs 3-4 weeks before the beginning of the term the student wishes to attend.
2. OAA will direct this letter to the Director of the Cohen Student Health Center for review, recommendations, and approval. The Director may contact the physician as indicated to obtain more information, and/or to discuss any requested accommodations. The Director will then submit recommendations/approval to OAA for processing.
3. Once approved to return to campus, OAA will remove the block on student registration, and will encourage the student/family to contact the appropriate departments to be certain that financial aid and housing arrangements are in place. In the event that the student did not make adequate academic progress due to the leave, the student will be directed on how to file an appeal for financial aid.

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