

FC5252/FC5293/FC5317

Posted on 29.01.2024 by Steve Forward

Category: [Flight Crew \(Commercial\)](#)

Report Title Sickness/Absence policies

Initial Report

FC5252 Report text: [Airline 1] sickness policy discourages crew calling sick.

FC5293 Report text: [Airline 2] sickness policy uses inappropriate rating of sickness. Crew are avoiding calling in sick. Rostering is inappropriate and due to disruption very often minimum rest. Often rostered into days off. Company assumes you will work into your day off. Crew are getting sick. Something needs to change. Even if the pressure to fly when sick is more perceived than actual, the bottom line is that when we cannot perform our duties and are not fit to fly we don't fly, and this has seemed to escape the company.

Crew are on their knees, particularly at [Airport].

FC5317 Report text: In [Airline 1], flight crew sickness is managed as a disciplinary matter. Any flight crew who reports unfit to fly twice within 3 months enters the first stage of a disciplinary process, the last stage of which is dismissal. Further sickness pushes you further into the process.

The reverse side of my medical certificate reminds me of my obligations with regard to flying whilst unfit to do so, and my employer is very well aware of these obligations. The only possible outcome from managing sickness in this way is to frighten and intimidate crew into not reporting sick. We have a large number of new flight crew, as well as many who have recently returned from redundancy, all of whom are very anxious not to get into trouble at this stage in their employment, and sending messages informing them they are now in a disciplinary process is an extremely intimidating thing to do, and runs totally contrary to flight safety.

Comment

Sickness/Absence policies seem to be another perennial topic that we keep banging the drum about. Results are patchy but we have had some successes in the past with companies altering their policies as a result of *CHIRP* activities. But the problem remains a focus for us and there is ongoing communication with [Airline 1] in particular to understand their sickness/absence management policy. There appear to be 3 elements to the debate:

- 1) the recognition that those who fly are different to those who do not because of the

physiological aspects that some sicknesses (such as colds) can have on those who aviate and, as a result, are perhaps more prone to declaring sickness than their ground-based contemporaries;

2) many companies have onerous pay-policies in respect of sickness whereby they remove basic pay at an early stage of sickness and revert to only the paltry Statutory Sickness Pay (contrary to many other more enlightened companies who understand that sickness is a fact of life and continue to pay the basic salary as part of their covenant with their employees); and

3) whilst no doubt intending to be clear in their processes, some companies' policies and communications for those who suffer repetitive sickness (such as multiple colds for example) can be perceived as intimidating and therefore appear to have the intention of discouraging those who are sick from removing themselves from duties, which not only puts them at risk of medical complications but also contravenes their duty not to operate if unfit to do so.

As in all things there is of course a balance, and companies must have appropriate processes to detect those who might abuse the system, but the emphasis in some companies seems to err more on the assumption of shirking rather than sickness. *CHIRP* has engaged many times with the CAA on this matter and we are encouraged to hear that there are ongoing debates within the industry Flight Operations Liaison Group (FOLG) 'Well-being' and 'Fatigue' forums to review best practice. What is required is a common and pragmatic approach to sickness/absence that recognises the unique situation that aviators are in, ensures that long-term or repetitive sufferers are able to receive appropriate attention and medical care as necessary, and removes the fear or stigma that might be attached to reporting sick on multiple occasions: all while giving companies the necessary tools to ensure that those who might take advantage of 'pulling a sickie' are not able to do so for long or recurrent periods.



