12 February 2019

TO: Members of the BFC

FR: Steve Sanders, Chair, Student Affairs Committee

RE: Discussion item for Feb. 19 meeting

The IU Health Center is proposing to change its policy on the "verification of visit" ("VOV) forms it provides to students. Currently the IUHC does not provide "excuses," but it does verify visits, and faculty are free to use that information however they see fit when a student is absent. Under the proposed change, the VOV forms, which currently are given to students who are seen at the IUHC for pretty much any reason, would be restricted to certain specific circumstances. The reasons for the proposed change are explained in the attached memo from Dr. Beth Rupp, the IUHC's medical director. The proposed new policy also is attached.

This is not a matter where the BFC has any formal legislative jurisdiction, but the IUHC nonetheless has sought faculty input. Dr. Rupp met with the Student Affairs Committee for over an hour in November to discuss these issues, and our committee was persuaded that the IUHC is taking the right approach. There was no opposition to the IUHC's proposed changes in VOV policy, and we understand that students who have been consulted, including the IU Student Association leadership, also support the changes.

The Student Affairs Committee believes that the IUHC policy change provides the opportunity for a *larger faculty conversation concerning how faculty, departments, and schools handle student attendance and absences*. That is the conversation we hope to begin during our time with the full council on Tuesday.

Apparently there is a large amount of variation on our campus on how absences are handled and how class attendance policies are communicated and enforced. Students find this situation vexing. Of course, no one believes that, at a university with so many different disciplines and modes of teaching, there could ever be a "one size fits all" attendance policy. Still, that doesn't necessarily mean we couldn't all do a better job at setting policies and expectations, communicating those expectations to students, and enforcing policies in fair and consistent ways when absences do occur.

Does the BFC have any role to play here? Does the VPFAA (or other campus-level offices) have any role to play? Should departments or schools encourage greater consistency among their faculties regarding absence policies? Those are some of the questions we hope you will consider in preparation for next Tuesday's discussion.

The Indiana University Health Center (IUHC) would like to encourage faculty to not require medical excuse notes when a student misses class. Many other universities have instituted this change over the past ten to twenty years.

Many students seek care at the IUHC only "to get a note" for illnesses that do not otherwise require professional attention, such as viral upper respiratory infections and self-limited gastrointestinal illnesses. This is problematic for many reasons:

1. It creates an overload on our system and we cannot see all the patients who need to be seen for other reasons.
2. Often these students come in to be seen after the illness and a medical provider has no verifiable way to know if the student was actually ill or incapacitated, relying solely only on the student's history. As medical professionals, we take the student's report as the truth.
3. The student may fabricate illnesses or exaggerate symptoms in order to obtain a note and then that report becomes a permanent part of their medical record.
4. It creates a financial hardship on students who have to use insurance coverage or pay the out of pocket $45 for an office visit in order to obtain a "note". It penalizes students who do not have insurance coverage that we accept or are unable to afford the $45 fee in order to stay on par with their peers who are able to afford this charge.
5. Requiring a visit to the IUHC is a time burden on the student.
6. Many students return later asking for a new note, saying that a professor requires more medical or specific information on the form. This compromises patient confidentiality.
7. Most importantly, it is counter to our mission of educating our students to be wise consumers of healthcare when we require them to seek out professional medical care when self-care is sufficient.

For these reasons, we feel the decision to excuse a student from class should be based on a conversation between the student and the professor, without requiring a medical provider to become involved.

The current IUHC policy states we will provide a VOV (Verification of Visit) form for any student who seen in the IUHC medical clinic for any reason. Obtaining a VOV verifies that the student was seen in the clinic, but it does not mean that we agree with the student's decision to not attend class. We are working on changes to our policy to start August 2019 where we will no longer provide VOV forms to our patients.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to further discussion.

Beth C Rupp, MD
Medical Director
Indiana University Health Center

PROPOSED NOTE POLICY

The IU Health Center does not issue medical excuses to students for short-term absences from class or assignments due to illness, injury, or mental health appointments. This policy reflects our respect for student's privacy and our educational mission to help students become mature and independent stewards of their own health care.

Situations where verification from a medical provider may be appropriate include, but are not limited to:

A. Verification of a health problem which results in a prolonged period of absence or incapacitation, usually defined as >5 days.
B. Verification of an acute infectious process when public health requirements prevents the student from attending classes, etc.
C. Verification of an IUHC initiated request that a student miss class
D. Verification of a health problem or clearance to return to work for an employer, including workplace restrictions or accommodations.
E. Verification of a health problem for an instructor if the student needs temporary restrictions or accommodations (i.e. student in a basketball class has a sprained ankle).
F. Verification of a health reason for terminating housing contracts
G. Verification of significant health problem which warrants dropping or taking an incomplete for a class or withdrawing from the university after the usual deadlines.
H. Verification of an illness that resulted in a travel cancellation (required to obtain refund).
I. Verification of a temporary or permanent disability

Situations where verification should be denied: "Excuses" for a missed class, exam, and/or late assignments, especially when requested after the illness or condition has passed. The IUHC is also not able to provide verification of a significant health problem that has been occurring over a prolonged period of time or which occurred in the past, but for which the IUHC has not been providing treatment.

A release of information must be completed in all cases where verification is requested and provided to an outside source. If the verification is provided directly to the student, who then chooses to release the information at their own discretion, no release is needed.

DRAFT