

The Guild Leader

Monday, April 20, 2015

GateHouse backs off change in Health care cutoff policy

(It Still Stinks)

The Guild discovered last week that GateHouse/LMG instituted a policy six months ago where the company stops paying its share of an employee's health insurance premiums if the employee is out sick 90 straight days, requiring the employee to pay the whole insurance premium her or himself.

However, after questioning by the Guild Thursday, company representatives acknowledged the 90-day limit had been imposed in error at the Journal. The company agreed that for Journal employees, the GateHouse You're-On-Your-Own (YOYO) date for health coverage would be pushed back to 180 straight days out sick. The reason is that the terms and conditions that were in place as of the sale from Belo to GateHouse on Sept. 3, 2014 were frozen in place as of that date until new ones are negotiated by the company and the Guild. The 90-day cut off was implemented on Oct. 14, 2014, more than a month after the sale.

Journal employees and the Guild only found out about the policy when two members on extended sick leave were called and told they were nearing the 90-day limit and needed to arrange COBRA payments with GateHouse if they wanted their insurance to continue while they remained in treatment. They called the Guild and we called the company on it.

The Guild has asked for more information about this YOYO policy. It isn't mentioned in the GateHouse policy manual, in the terms of employment we were given in September or in the health plan handouts Guild members received describing the benefits offered by GateHouse.

The company said the 180-day limit was in effect on Sept. 3, when GateHouse took over the Journal in an asset sale, which GateHouse used to throw out our contract and impose its own conditions. But because there is union in Providence, those Sept. 3 conditions were locked in and by law can now only be changed by negotiating with us.

The discovery of this policy and its effect on our members took over much of a scheduled bargaining session Thursday morning. After a somewhat contentious start of the meeting, and a subsequent break for further research to get answers prompted by questions from the Guild, the company came back and said it had found out the change should have bargained it with us.

Though 180 days is better than 90 days, we are still concerned and have asked to be shown a copy of the policy (we haven't actually seen it or how it's worded) and be told where we can find it. If someone is so sick or injured that they are unable to work for that long, the last thing they need to be worrying about is finding the money to pay for health insurance at the exact moment they need it the most.