

# Reference Guide

## Response to Death of University Employee

*It is important for the University be prepared to answer difficult questions and to provide support and guidance to management and survivors when dealing with this sensitive topic. The information provided in this guide is for reference purposes only. As each situation will be unique, good judgment and sensitivity should be used when dealing with the deceased employee's family, significant others and co-workers.*

The loss of an employee can be devastating to the work environment. University management, human resources and payroll staff serve critical roles in ensuring that such an event is handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner. This guide is intended to serve as a resource that outlines the actions that need to be taken when an employee passes away, so that the employee's loved ones and co-workers receive the information and assistance they need, and that applicable Federal and State Law as well as required State policies and procedures are followed. The Human Resources (HR) office will be the primary point of contact for the deceased employee's spouse, child, significant other or beneficiary. **It is also important to emphasize that University HR and payroll staff must coordinate activities and maintain close communication throughout the process.**

**Note:** *An employee's final wishes, beneficiaries and financial arrangements may not be known by the University or even the employee's family. HR representatives, payroll and other University staff are reminded that confidential information must be safeguarded and are cautioned not to reveal confidential information to anyone who is not entitled to it.*

# Roles and Responsibilities of University Staff

The Human Resources Benefits Office will serve as the primary point of contact to coordinate University information/action as noted below in response to a death of an employee.

## University

**Response Team** (Human Resources; Department representative; Payroll; Legal; Risk Management; Safety and Security (RMSS); Police/Public Safety-if death on campus; Public Relations; and others to be determined based on circumstances):

- Attend initial response team meeting to discuss and determine a plan of action  
Plan of action items include, but not limited to:
  - Discuss details of employee death relevant to university responsibilities
  - Review applicable university policies related to employee death
  - Review the Reference Guide Response to Death of University Employee
    - Discuss role of each team member and needed action items
  - Communication requirements and templates
    - Establish primary family/representative contacts
- Attend all scheduled status meetings until all action items for the team are complete
- Keep Benefits Director or designee informed of all communication and other activities related to the death of an employee

## Human Resources

### **Benefits Director or designee**

- Discuss situation with Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources to determine all appropriate contacts to serve on a response team, including the primary HR representative(s) for the supervisor and family/representative
- Send Response Team Notification email to all members to inform them of the employee's death, the need to meet, and immediate action items as designated
  - Payroll - freeze any payroll transactions for deceased employee
  - Human Resources Management Systems (HRMS) – to initiate termination of all employee university access to include email, systems, building by entering the “Deceased Indicator” in Banner
- Conduct initial response team meeting as soon as possible
- Obtain family/representative contact information from department head and/or response team department member
- Contact the family/representative by phone within two weeks to:
  - Offer condolences
  - Set up a meeting or phone conference to review benefits information (providing hard copy forms), answer questions, and assist with claims
  - Inform them a Human Resources/Payroll letter to the family/representative will be mailed, with a summary of final pay, benefits and other information, including contacts for assistance
  - Arrange for delivery of benefits information (may be via overnight delivery, pickup, email, etc.)
- Complete plan specific benefit actions
- Conduct the meeting, assisting with questions/claims (include designated Human Resource – Employee Relations, ORP Retirement Plan Representative, and Payroll contacts)
- Complete status updates for all benefit items until closed
- Coordinate Response Team status meetings until all action items are completed

## **Employee Relations:**

- Schedule meeting as soon as possible with employee's supervisor to provide information about EAP options for individual or workgroup counseling
- Participate with benefits in conducting the meeting with family/representative to cover assistance provided to families under the employee assistance program
- Follow-up with Department Head and supervisor within two weeks after the death to ensure they have received any EAP services deemed necessary and are aware of the process to obtain them if additional assistance is needed

## **Human Resources Management Systems (HRMS)**

- Enter the "Deceased Indicator" in to initiate removal of all employee university access to email, systems, building (removal of phone access should be handled by the department with a request to ITS IT Service Desk)
- Add to the separations list to include "Contact Benefits Director" for reason and distribute to designated contacts
- Coordinate with Information and Technology Services (ITS) and assist Department Head as needed with other access issues

## **Department Head or designee**

- Notify family/representative
- Notify benefits office through the Benefits Director or designee (by phone and email) upon any communication about an employee's death, and provide family/representative contact information, if available
- Determine how staff should be notified of employee's death
- Provide guidance to appropriate staff (e.g., office receptionist, phone operator) what information to release about the employee based on advise provided by Human Resources and Legal
- Contact family/representative to express condolences, offer assistance and provide contact information of Human Resources representative
- Send condolences (personal letter/flowers).
- Coordinate with Public Relations to arrange for an appropriate notice to be placed on the Inside UNC Charlotte online publication for faculty and staff
  - PR will need a recent photo (if available), the employee's working job title, a one- or two-sentence quote from employee's supervisor or department head
  - PR will consult on other features of an internal obituary
- Check with employee's supervisor/work unit within two weeks after the death to ensure they have received any EAP services deemed necessary and are aware of the process to obtain them if additional assistance is needed

## **Supervisor**

- Notify Risk Management, Safety and Security (RMSS) immediately if any work-related injury results in death
  - Immediate notification should be verbal followed by written incident report
  - Meet with Department Head and/or Assistant Director to discuss notification of staff
- Coordinate with Payroll regarding any needed information about time worked/comp time earned, leave utilized, etc.
- Meet with staff
  - Advise of employee's death, if not already known
  - Discuss availability of EAP for individual or workgroup counseling/debriefing and provide EAP contact information to staff
- Assign staff to handle the employee's phone calls, appointments and workload
- Secure employee's personal effects (not move until coordination family/representative of disposition of personal effects)
- Coordinate with Department Head/Assistant Director regarding the retrieval of university property

- Keep Department Head/Assistant Director informed of all communication and other activities related to the death of an employee
- Ensure all items on [Supervisor Check List – Death of Employee](#) are completed

## **Payroll**

- Freeze any payroll transactions for deceased employee
- Determine final payout date and amount (include any wages, annual leave, bonus leave, longevity - work with benefits as needed, overtime pay, compensatory, and compensatory holiday pay, etc.)
- Provide information to Benefits Director or designee to include in the Human Resources/Payroll letter to the family/representative
- Participate with benefits in conducting the meeting with family/representative to address any payroll related questions/concerns
- Ensure all Payroll items are completed

## **Legal Affairs**

- Consult as necessary with all departments concerning legal requirements and responsibilities

## **International Student/Scholar Office**

- Consult with all departments when applicable

## **Office of Public Relations**

- Publish announcements on the death of employees primarily through Inside UNC Charlotte, the Web publication targeting staff and faculty
- Official university-wide communication should occur only through Inside UNC Charlotte, although departments and teams may communicate within their departments and teams on a distributed basis
- Announcements are subject to University Communications criteria (reference Department Head section above for more information)
- Contact Department Head to coordinate an appropriate notification
- The PR office will not communicate directly with the family of the deceased employee, nor submit the internal obituary for approval by family

## **Environmental Health & Safety Office**

- The EHS Office will follow guidelines published in North Carolina Workers' Compensation Act, Office of State Human Resources Incident program, and University EHS policy

## **Risk Management, Safety and Security (RMSS)**

- Contact Risk Management immediately, if the incident is critical and involves an employer related activity or event