



## SOCIAL SECURITY

### MEMORANDUM

**Refer To:**

**Date:** April 1996

**To:** See Below

**From:** Deputy Commissioner  
for Operations

President, Council 220  
AFGE

**Subject:** Tuberculosis (TB) Interviewing Policy for Field Operations - Information

As a result of the continuous concerns expressed by field office employees who come in contact with members of the public and the rising incidences of tuberculosis in the general population, the Field operations National Health and National Health and Safety Committee developed the attached tuberculosis interviewing policy for field office personnel.

This interviewing policy was developed with the objective of ensuring that SSA continue to provide a safe and healthy work environment for its employees and that claimants who visit our field offices are treated with dignity and respect.

We are requesting that the information in the attached policy be shared with all employees. Copies of the policy should be provided to American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) representatives. A copy should also be posted to field office bulletin boards.

The FO Health and Safety committee will be reviewing appropriate videos and other materials to be used by field offices in educating employees on TB. This information will be provided at a later date.

We are requesting that Regional Commissioner take appropriate steps to ensure that this policy is followed and that field office managers and supervisors handle situations involving TB consistent with the policy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
/S/  
Janice Warden

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/S/  
Witold Skwierczynski

Attachment: Tuberculosis (TB) interviewing Policy for Field Operations

**Addressees**

All regional Commissioners

All Area Directors

All District and Branch Managers

All teleservice Center Managers

All Contact and Resident Stations

All AFGE Representatives (managers provide copies)

### **Summary**

The National Health and Safety Committee for Field Operations has proposed the attached Tuberculosis (TB) Interviewing Policy for field offices.

The Committee recommends that once this policy is implemented, that the Teleservice Center Operating Guides (TSCOG) be updated to reflect instructions on telephone interviewing policies. When making a teleclaims appointment, the remarks section should be annotated that the person has TB.

Field Office manager should make every effort to interview claimants with untreated or inadequately treated TB by teleclaims. If necessary, these cases should be handled similarly to the producers established for terminally ill (TERI) cases.

The committee will be reviewing appropriate informational videos to be used by Field Offices for educating employees on TB.

## **FIELD OFFICE TUBERCULOSIS INTERVIEWING POLICY**

### 1. Purpose

The Public should always be treated compassionately and professionally, and not be discriminated against for any reason. However, every effort will be made to reduce, as much as possible, the risk of contracting TB from a member of the public. This instruction outlines the policy for employees who interview or otherwise come in contact with members of the public who may have active TB.

### 2. Definitions

Field offices means District offices, Branch Offices, resident stations, contact stations, Teleservice Centers.

TB is defined as *Mycobacterium Tuberculosis*.

TB infection- a condition in which TB bacteria is alive but inactive in the body. People with TB infection have no symptoms, don't feel sick, can't spread TB to others, and usually have a positive skin test reaction. However, they may develop TB disease later in life if they do not receive preventative therapy. Five percent of people who test positive for TB infection may develop TB disease within a short period of time. Another five percent may develop TB disease late in life.

TB disease- an illness in which TB bacteria are multiplying and attacking different parts of the body. The symptoms of TB disease including weakness, weight loss, fever, no appetite, chills, and sweating at night. Other symptom of TB disease depends on where in the body the bacteria are growing. If TB is in the lungs (pulmonary disease), the symptoms may include a bad cough, pain in the chest, a and coughing up blood.

Adequately treated TB refers to a person with active TB who is currently taking anti-tuberculosis drugs under medical supervision. If properly treated and not confined, such persons are no longer contagious.

Untreated or inadequately treated TB refers to persons who have been diagnosed as having active TB or TB disease but who have not been received therapy or who have stopped taking their anti-tuberculosis drugs before being released from treatment.

### 3. Policy

A. Management will provide a safe and healthy work environment for all employees and members of the public.

In accordance with Article 9 of the contract, tissues will be provided on every interviewing desk

- B. Local health professionals will be contracted to arrange to speak to employees but TB when managers and the Union Health & Safety Rep feel that it would benefit the local office. This could be bi-annually, annually, every other year, etc.

Managers will make employees aware of the TB hot line, 410-965-2233, which has been established to answer questions about TB.

- A. It is recognized that anyone who prefers an in-office interview is entitled to one. The preferred method for interviewing members of the public who have been diagnosed with untreated or inadequately treated active TB will be to handle their Social Security business by telephone. (TSC's and/or employees receiving telephone calls in the local office should be reminded to attempt to set up interviews by phone.) If the claimant does not have a telephone, the interviewer should attempt to establish a third-party contact to conduct a phone interview.

If during the course of an interview, the interviewer learns that a member of the public has active TB which is not being adequately treated, or the interviewee exhibits all signs of active TB (see definition) including vigorous coughing, he/she may interrupt the interview and refer the case to management.

In accordance with CFR Part 1960.46(a), an employee has the right to "...decline to perform his/her assigned task because of a reasonable belief that, under the circumstances the task poses an imminent risk of death or serious bodily harm coupled with a reasonable belief that there is insufficient time to seek effective redress through normal hazard reporting and abatement procedures established in accordance with this part."

Once it has been determined that an interviewee has an untreated or inadequately treated TB, management has the option of either soliciting a volunteer to complete the interview or arranging a telephone interview.

Management will ensure that the 800 number is prominently displayed in the reception area. Management will also ensure that hospitals, welfare departments, homeless shelters, advocacy groups, and other organizations are aware of the 800 number.

- D. Referral of a case to management by an employee who reasonably believes that his/her health and safety is jeopardized should not be used as a basis for disciplinary action.
- E. If an employee is exposed to someone at the worksite with active TB, the employee will be offered a TB screening test during work hours as outlined in SSA's SERIOUS INFECTIOUS DISEASE TESTING POLICY dated October 11, 1994 issued by the Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources. An employee's claim for workers' compensation should be forwarded to the servicing personnel office immediately.
- F. The above guidelines also apply to employees who make field contacts in which they conduct face to face interviews.

#### 4. Responsibility

Regional Commissioners will ensure that this policy is followed. Field Office manager/supervisor will handle situations involving TB exposure consistent with this policy.