

COOPERATING WITH THE PLANT PHYSICIAN

Our plant physicians are usually very busy men. We can help them understand Brake Shoe policy and the medical program by presenting the doctor with a Nurses Manual of Procedure. To be sure that they have read the manual, particularly the part directly related to them and their part in the program, we can discuss the subject with them. I confess that when I first thought of the subject of cooperating with the plant physician it seemed that it was simply a matter of orienting the physician with Brake Shoe policy and making sure that employees kept their appointments at the doctor's office. Imagine my surprise when just at vacation time, this year one of the plant physicians wrote a letter in which he complained that we frequently arrived ten minutes late for a visit and thus upset his schedule of appointments. It certainly made me realize that from time to time it might be a good idea to ask the doctor if he is satisfied with us and perhaps we can iron out any existing dissatisfaction before it becomes serious. On the other hand we can explain to the doctor that employees visits are made on company time and the longer the employee must wait in the doctor's office, the more man hours in production are lost. This last is most frequently the complaint of management.

I had just returned from vacation when management at another plant, complained that frequently employees have to wait at the doctor's office for one and two hours. Such a loss of time can be due to a poor scheduling of appointments by the doctor's receptionist if it happens often or because of an emergency with priority, if it happens seldom. We have tried to work out a system whereby we issue each employee an authorization for medical treatment. This shows what time the employee left and returned to the shop and what time he arrived and left the doctor's office. There is also space for instructions and comments by the physician. It shows too, the time of the next appointment. I think it will prove to be a valuable record. It will keep the employer posted regarding the progress of the injury and the exact manhours lost in production.

As a general rule though, the plant physician seldom complains. It seems to me that his chief concern is that we return for treatment as scheduled. Sometimes the injured employee feels that the wound has healed and time used to return to the doctor is waste. However, he doesn't realize as we do, that for the insurance record, the doctor must see and officially discharge the patient.

As for the problem of time lost in the doctor's waiting room, I've made an extra effort to be friendly with the doctor's receptionist and when we arrive, I ask her about how the appointments are going. If the doctor hasn't yet arrived or if there are emergencies to be treated before us, we arrange to have our employees return at a later date rather than wait that day for one or two hours.

I remember one receptionist whom I asked "How long does Clarence have to wait?" She became quite upset and told me that naturally we would have to wait our turn. We didn't have special privileges. Later that day I found time to get a pound of candy and took it to her and asked her to please be "sweet". By that time she felt good enough to laugh it off and I was sure that the incident of the morning wouldn't spoil our relationship. I had intended no wrong but I vowed that in the future I would phrase my words more carefully.