Work Leave, FMLA, and Disability Documentation Policy

Migraine and other headache disorders can cause significant and sometimes severe disability. We aim to support our patients while also ensuring that any medical certification we provide is accurate, clinically appropriate, and within the scope of headache specialty care. Migraine and other headache disorders are legitimate medical conditions that can be profoundly disabling. Our role is to diagnose and treat headache disorders and document their medical and functional effects. **Comprehensive or ongoing assessment of a patient's overall ability to work is not a service provided by our headache clinic.**

Our clinic can document the headache disorder we are treating, its symptoms, treatment, and headache-related functional limitations. We may provide limited medical leave certification as described below. However, our clinic does not provide ongoing occupational disability management, comprehensive work-capacity or functional-capacity evaluation, long-term disability assessment, or repeated certification of continuous inability to work.

The following sections outline the scope and limitations of work-leave and disability documentation provided by Puget Sound Neurology:

- **Intermittent FMLA:** We may provide intermittent FMLA certification when migraine or another headache disorder causes episodic periods of incapacity that are supported by the medical record. Certification is individualized based on the documented clinical history and the treating provider's clinical judgment. If the frequency or duration of work absence becomes extensive enough to require ongoing assessment of the patient's overall ability to work, further leave or disability certification may need to be managed by primary care, occupational medicine, PM&R, or another clinician who performs work-capacity or disability assessments.

- **Continuous medical leave:** Continuous leave is not routinely certified by the headache clinic for chronic migraine, persistent migraine symptoms, exacerbation of migraine symptoms, or while waiting for a treatment to become effective. A short period of continuous leave may be considered when continuous absence from work is medically necessary to complete a defined, time-limited headache treatment plan, such as inpatient headache treatment or a medically supervised medication-overuse headache withdrawal regimen. When medically supported, continuous leave through the headache clinic is limited to a maximum of **14 consecutive calendar days**. The headache clinic does not certify extensions of continuous leave beyond this period. Any continued continuous leave must be managed by the patient's primary care provider, occupational medicine, PM&R, or another clinician who performs work-capacity/disability assessments. We remain responsible for treating the patient's headache disorder and are happy to provide our clinical notes and treatment records to the clinician managing additional leave.

- **Short-term and long-term disability:** We do not provide ongoing short-term disability management, long-term disability certification, permanent disability determination, vocational assessment, or comprehensive functional-capacity evaluation. A short-term disability form may be considered only when it corresponds to a medically supported period of leave that falls within the headache clinic's 14-day continuous-leave policy (see above). Any extension or ongoing disability claim must be transferred

to another clinician.

- **Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave:** Washington PFML documentation is subject to the same clinical and scope limitations described above. We may certify that a patient has a qualifying serious health condition and provide medically supportable information regarding headache-related incapacity. PFML does not change the headache clinic's policy regarding ongoing continuous leave or disability management. We do not charge a fee for completion of Washington PFML certification forms. However, a clinical visit may be required when the existing medical record does not contain sufficient current information to support the requested certification. The clinical visit may be billed in the usual manner.

- **Appointments for leave or disability paperwork:** A dedicated appointment is required when the requested leave has not recently been evaluated, represents a significant change, involves continuous leave within the headache clinic's 14-day limit, or requires assessment of current functional limitations. Requests for continuous leave beyond 14 consecutive calendar days will not be certified by the headache clinic and should be directed to the clinician managing the patient's ongoing work capacity/disability. A paperwork-related visit is a clinical reassessment and may require the entire scheduled appointment. Headache medication management, procedures, or unrelated concerns may require a separate appointment.

- **Medical certification:** Forms will be completed only with information that can reasonably be supported by the medical record and the clinician's assessment. A patient's requested dates, frequency of absences, or duration of leave cannot automatically be certified. Submission of paperwork does not guarantee that the requested leave will be medically supported or approved. Eligibility and benefit decisions are made by the employer, insurer, or applicable government program.

- **Coordination with another clinician:** If continuous leave beyond 14 days or ongoing disability management is needed, we are happy to send our notes, imaging information, treatment records, and other relevant documentation to the patient's primary care provider, occupational medicine clinician, PM&R clinician, or disability evaluator. The headache clinic will continue managing the patient's headache disorder while that clinician manages work capacity and leave.

- **Submitting paperwork:** Patients are responsible for completing all patient/employee portions of forms before submitting them to our office and for providing the requested leave dates, job information, and any applicable job description. Incomplete forms may be returned without completion. **Forms that require a new or updated assessment of work capacity, functional limitations, restrictions, continuous leave, or an extension of leave require a dedicated clinical visit before they can be completed.** Forms may be completed without an additional visit only when the provider already has sufficient recent clinical information to support the requested certification. Paperwork will not be completed solely on the basis of a portal message or telephone request when a clinical reassessment is required. Please allow adequate processing time; submission of paperwork does not create an urgent medical request or guarantee completion by an employer or insurer's requested deadline.