Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, Faculty Senate

October 12, 2021

Jennifer Rutledge Pettie
Associate Vice Chancellor for Healthcare and Policy
University System of Georgia

Re: Resolution regarding Tobacco Surcharge Errors and Refunds

Dear Ms. Pettie,

I write to you as the President of the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate to present a resolution that was adopted on at our most recent meeting (October 5, 2021). The measure, which I've attached below, comes in response to complaints by faculty and staff at UGA and other campuses who have been charged the tobacco user surcharge in error and who were unable to secure refunds.

The Franklin Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of this three-point resolution, which addresses these concerns. Given the fact that the open enrollment period is looming, would you please let me know before Open Enrollment begins on the 25th whether the Benefits Enrollment staff have fixed the glitch problem that many of us (including me) experienced last year? Have you changed the settings so that employees aren't presumed to be smokers? The vast majority of Georgians don't smoke, and I would hazard a guess that smoking rates are even lower on our campuses. Could you address the logic of making the default "smoker"? And, finally, when can we expect refunds to go out to affected employees?

As you can see, the Senate also asks that you communicate about this with all employees of USG so that they can watch for this potential error and notify their benefits office staff immediately.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Cindy Hahamovitch
B. Phinizy Spalding Distinguished Professor of History
President, Franklin Faculty Senate

cc. Sherry Gray, Administrative Specialist II, Franklin College
Alex Medina, Chair, Human Resources Committee, University Council

Resolution to Fix the OneUSG Benefits Enrollment System, and to Refund Employees to Whom the Tobacco Surcharge Was Applied In Error

1. WHEREAS, the current benefits enrollment system applies a $100/month tobacco user surcharge to all covered employees and their dependents by default, meaning that nonsmoking workers—in a state where 84% of people do not smoke[1]—must explicitly opt out, or else pay this substantial penalty; and,

2. WHEREAS, in the 2020 enrollment period, a software glitch, reported by multiple employees and documented by the United Campus Workers of Georgia (UCWGA), reclassified many workers as smokers after they opted out, obligating those enrollees to opt out twice or pay the surcharge; and,

3. WHEREAS, there is no regular system to appeal this surcharge if it was charged in error, and UCWGA has documented several instances of employees attempting, and failing, to get refunded;

4. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the OneUSG Connect enrollment system be modified such that nonsmokers are not presumed to smoke and are not charged by default; and,

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a process be established by OneUSG Connect to fully refund those who have been charged in error; and,

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this process be advertised to all potentially impacted employees of the USG.

[1] https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/Smoking/state/GA