

Eldercare Emergency Visitation Travel Sees Wide Use —

New benefit for employees and spouses now in FAM

When we are posted overseas, the people we leave behind often worry about our health, safety and wellbeing. They're not the only ones worrying. Foreign Service employees and their spouses serving abroad of-

*"This will be very significant to many who struggle to balance their overseas work/life with caring for family needs."
— Nurse Practitioner, EUR post*

*"As I get ready to head back on Eldercare EVT, I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate this benefit . . . It makes me proud to work in this organization."
— Employee in Guadalajara*

ten have elderly parents who require our assistance in making new care or living arrangements. With Eldercare Emergency Visitation Travel (EVT), implemented on January 15, 2001, employees and their families now have this "life benefit." Separate from Medical EVT, Eldercare EVT allows an employee two trips over a career to visit his/her parents and an identical benefit for the employee's spouse.

Since its inception six months ago, the Eldercare EVT already has helped more than 125 employees and spouses travel from 65 posts to visit their ailing parents. The benefit allows only one member of a family to travel per visit, with the government paying roundtrip airfare, mandatory airport taxes and transportation between airports. Employees may take Eldercare EVT based on their available leave hours or approved leave without pay (LWOP) with agreement from post.

Note: The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) permits a total of 12 weeks of unpaid leave, although an employee may substitute paid sick or annual leave.

Although many of the same regulations guide the use of Eldercare EVT, it is not the same as Medical EVT. Eldercare EVT should be requested when an employee or spouse needs to assist a parent in making a new transition, while Medical EVT should be requested if an employee or spouse's parent is having an acute medical crisis.

According to the State Department's Announcement Number 2001_07_043, "Questions and Answers on Eldercare Emergency Visitation Travel," "The Department can respond to request for Eldercare EVT in a week or less, while it can respond overnight to requests for Medical EVT. If an employee travels in advance of authorization, the post must advise HR/ER/WLP (for Eldercare EVT) or MED/FP (for Medical EVT) via immediate cable on the next working day after travel has commenced."

Those requesting approval for Eldercare EVT must demonstrate how the traveler will be assisting the parent. When requesting authorization for EVT, employees are limited by budget constraints from claiming more than two "parental individuals." The "two visit" limit applies to ALL EVT requests—Medical, Death or Eldercare. "Once two parental individuals are chosen, under EVT regulations, no other parents may be considered for additional official travel." Once two EVT trips have been taken, an employee may still take a Medical EVT, however. Depending on the circumstances, an employee may also ask his/her spouse to take the EVT in his/her place.

According to statistics published by the Department's Office of Employee Relations during the past six months, the majority of Eldercare EVT came out of the European Bureau, followed by the African Bureau. In total, forty-five travelers were employees; 58 were eli-

gible spouses. The Department estimates the average trip costs \$1600, which could bring the total costs this year to \$580,000. Here is just a sampling of some of the more typical justifications used to request Eldercare EVT:

- to assist frail 82-year-old father as mother's terminal illness worsens
- to move mother to nursing home
- to arrange home care for 84-year-old father with crippling multiple sclerosis
- to assist siblings in assessing 77-year-old mother's ability to continue living independently
- to provide temporary care to frequently hospitalized mother before her admission to nursing home, only child

Employees are encouraged to read the above-referenced Department notice or refer to cable 2001 State 8787 for more information on the new Eldercare EVT. The newly revised Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) has included Eldercare in its subchapter on EVT (3 FAM 3740).

For additional guidance, employees may contact Dependent Care Coordinator Sydnee Tyson in the Office of Employee Relations, Work/Life Programs (HR/ER/WLP) at tysonsl@state.gov.

“ . . . Just wanted . . . to let you know how much this benefit is being appreciated overseas. One senior FSO told me today it's the first new benefit she can recall in her 25 years in the Foreign Service. While I suspect there are a few others that she's not pulling up from memory, it speaks volumes about perceptions overseas ”
—Administrative Officer, NEA/SA post

Eldercare EVT Statistics

(For period January 15 - July 17, 2001)

Total number of requests:	133
Average trip cost::	\$1640.00
Total funds allocated (FY01):	\$368,338.00
Funds obligated to date:	\$194,518.00
Estimated annual cost::	\$436,240.00
(Double the number of trips X per-trip cost)	
Requests denied:	6
Requests cancelled:	8
Travelers who are employees:	45
Travelers who are eligible spouses:	58
Travelers who've used 2-trip limit:	2

(Statistics provided by the State Dept. Office of Employee Relations, Work/Life Programs.)

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- How Technology Can Make Your Life Overseas Easier

Essays should be approximately 2000 words or less or about 10 typed, double-spaced pages. Submissions must be in electronic form either as an e-mail attachment or on diskette. Deadline: January 30, 2002. *For more information, contact the editors Melissa Hess and Patricia Linderman at editor@aafsw.org.*

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