

Medical Information

FROM THE "Did You Know?" E-MAIL SERIES PROVIDED BY THE
NOVA SCOTIA UNION OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE EMPLOYEES

Talking about illness is almost as common as talking about the weather. So it's almost natural for an employee who calls in sick to give all the gory details of her/his stomach flu or cold. But you should try to resist.

Nearly every NSUPE collective agreement specifies that the employer is not entitled to the private medical information of an employee. For example, the Local 14 agreement states:

17.07(d) The Employer shall not be entitled to any private or confidential medical information, including a diagnosis on any employee. The Employer shall keep confidential any private information of which it becomes aware.

You may not mind your supervisor knowing about some medical conditions but there are others that you will want to keep to yourself. If you always give details, your supervisor will wonder what you're holding back when all of a sudden you don't. As well, in other workplaces an innocent comment about a symptom such as a backache has led to employees having to go to considerable lengths to prove their medical fitness to do their job.

Doctors sometimes need to be reminded that the only information needed on a routine medical certificate is "patient is (or was) unable to work due to illness".

There are times, such as when an accommodation of a disability is being requested, when it will be necessary to divulge some medical information. But those times are relatively rare, and even then it is usually only limited information that is needed.

If you are ever asked for medical information from your employer or asked to sign a Release allowing your doctor to release medical information to your employer, NSUPE urges you to first seek the advice of a union representative.

NOTE: The "Did You Know?" series is general information only. For advice specific to your workplace or personal circumstances, please contact a union representative. Comments are welcome at nsupe@ns.sympatico.ca.

