

# BENEFITS OF REPORTING HEALTH CONDITIONS

On-site safety is important in any business operation, but perhaps never more so than within the construction industry. Employers will comply with regulations when it comes to workplace safety, but what's sometimes overlooked is the risk health conditions may present, which are often not immediately visible and tend to go undisclosed.

## THE INVISIBLE THREAT

Not only can a workplace accident cause a project to have downtime and possible repairs, it can also have a serious physical impact on other workers, depending on the severity of the incident and whether or not heavy machinery or equipment is involved. The ramifications of an employee not disclosing a known medical condition that could compromise workplace safety are significant.

There are valid reasons for construction workers choosing to keep medical conditions private and, in many cases, that decision makes sense because their symptoms don't impact their work. However, there can be serious symptoms present in some medical conditions that can affect an individual's ability to carry out tasks.

## SYMPTOMS WITH AN IMPACT:

- **Feeling lightheaded or dizzy**
- **Forgetfulness**
- **Seizures**
- **Sleep disorder/fatigue**
- **Side effects of prescribed medication**

## HEALTH CONDITIONS AND THE LAW

There are some circumstances in which an individual may be required by federal law to disclose information relevant to their medical condition to an employer.

For instance, if an employee requests to take leave from work due to a certain medical condition for more than a specified number of days, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and/or the employer's internal policies may require a medical certificate from the individual's doctor confirming the existence of a serious medical condition as defined by the FMLA.

## REASONS TO DISCLOSE A CONDITION

1. Disclosing a medical condition to an employer may make an individual's work environment less stressful, and account for any changes in behavior while at work.
2. Giving an employer knowledge of a condition means they can assist a worker if they suddenly become ill or need medical treatment while in the workplace.
3. In some states, an employer can be liable if they violate state confidentiality laws by disclosing certain medical conditions of employees to others, so there is a better sense of trust and security.

Although not legally mandated by the department of labor, disclosing medical conditions which may impact the safety of the employee and/or other co-workers should be encouraged. This can only be achieved through building trust.

Burton Construction's Safety Director, Joseph Spanjer, explains:

*"By opening the lines of communication and giving assurances about confidentiality and fairness, everyone can be kept safer on site. Unfortunately, not all employers are as understanding and/or accommodating and by offering assurances to workers of fair treatment we can instigate mindset change across the industry."*

## ENCOURAGING BEST PRACTICE

By creating an honest and transparent working environment, sub-contractors and employees are more likely to disclose existing medical conditions or the fact that they simply feel unwell on site.

For example, if a worker is limited by a health condition which can cause lightheadedness then the contractor will ensure they are not operating equipment at height, such as a scissor lift. If the individual is undergoing medical treatment and is declared fit to work, then the contractor must still carry out safety checks regularly to ensure emergency shut-offs are active and fully operational and tie offs are being used by workers to eliminate fall risks from raised equipment.

## KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE ON SITE

Medical conditions with physical or behavioral symptoms don't necessarily mean a construction worker cannot be safe on site, but steps may be taken to ensure they are working within any limitations they may have, whether temporary or permanent.

