

## **FIPPA/PHIA INFORMATION SHEET #1**

### **Personal Health Information Use And Disclosure**

Use (within the university) and disclosure (outside the university) of personal health information when staff members are absent for medical reasons.

A fundamental principle of The Personal Health Information Act is the limiting principle. Use and disclosure of personal health information must be limited to:

The persons who need to know;  
The minimum amount necessary.

When a member of staff is absent for medical reasons, inform only those who need to know in order for the authorized functions of the department to continue. Provide only the minimum amount necessary. A statement such as "person x is away for medical reasons and will not be in until next Monday at the earliest" is appropriate and should be provided to the person's supervisor and any other colleagues whose work functions may be affected.

The Act does not easily accommodate the use and disclosure of health information for compassionate purposes such as sending flowers and cards. However, PHIA 22(2)(c)(i) says that personal health information may be disclosed if the disclosure is for the purpose of contacting a relative or friend of an individual who is injured, incapacitated, or ill. This permits, but does not oblige, the notification of staff members who are friends of the individual. The limiting principle still applies.

There should be a common understanding among staff members about who will be informed and what will be done when an individual is absent for medical reasons. In a given situation, if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the individual will not mind, it may be appropriate to release limited health information to a limited number of people, provided that the individual has not instructed otherwise.

Departments and units should:

Establish rules as to who will be informed and what will be done when someone is absent for medical reasons. If possible, staff members who are notified of such absences should ask to what extent this information can be shared.

Check with the individual first if there is any doubt about who should be informed and what health information should be given, especially if the information seems to be particularly sensitive.

Avoid disclosing any staff member's home address, phone number, email address, or other personal information, unless the individual has given permission for this disclosure.

If you are unsure about the use and disclosure of personal health information contact the Access & Privacy Coordinator's Office at 474-8339 or 474-9462.

(April 28, 2003)