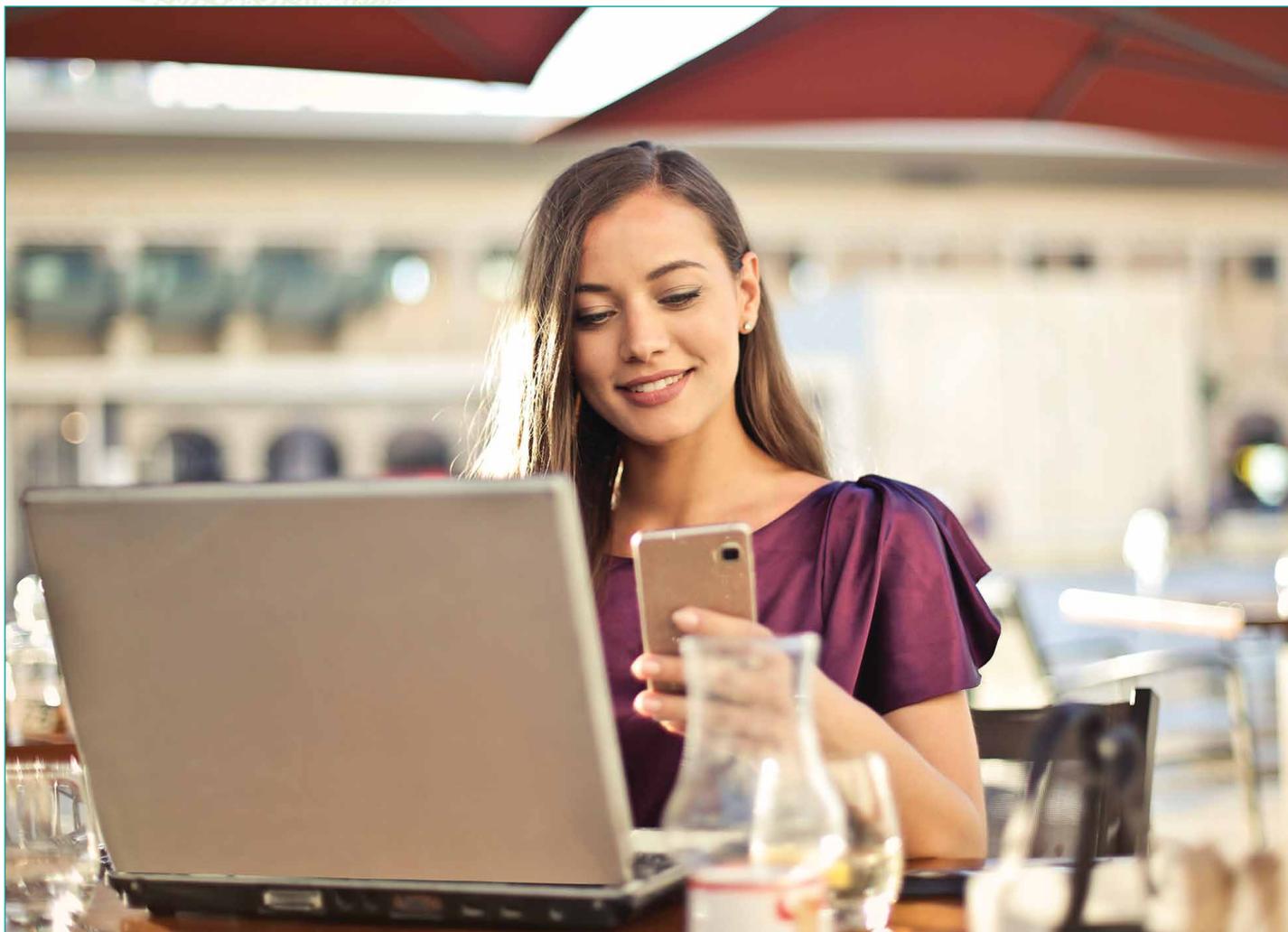


## Telling work



### Telling work - key points

- You do not have to tell your employer about your bleeding disorder unless your health condition means there is a risk to workplace safety or you may not be able to perform the basic requirements of your job
- You may decide that it's best to tell your manager regardless of any risk, as it may help them to understand your situation and support you
- Disclosing your bleeding disorder to a chosen workmate may mean they are prepared to help you if you have a bleed at work and need medical assistance
- An ABDR patient card can be useful in emergency situations at work: it contains information on your bleeding disorder, treatment details and your Haemophilia Treatment Centre contact details, which can be given to hospital staff
- Before you tell people at work, find out what you can about workplace policies and attitudes
- Be informed about your bleeding disorder so that you can educate others
- Talk to your Haemophilia Treatment Centre (HTC) or union if you would like some help with disclosing your bleeding disorder at work.

Generally you are not required to tell your employer or a prospective employer that you have a bleeding disorder or carry the gene unless it is a risk to the safety of the workplace or you may not be able to perform the basic requirements of the job. There are exceptions, for example, if you're applying to the Australian Defence Force or police force. These exceptions are explained in more detail in the section **What does the law say**, on page 27.

Sometimes it's easier for everyone involved if you don't volunteer information unless asked, but you might decide that it's in your best interest to do so, particularly if you have a bleeding tendency.

*“ I didn't see any need to tell them as it wasn't going to affect my work. ”*

You may prefer some people at your workplace to know for support. For example, explaining to your manager or a workmate that you have heavy or painful periods might help them to understand what's going on for you, especially if you need extra breaks or time off work. It will also give your employer the chance to make changes to your job so you can continue to work as a productive member of a team, for example, using an option of flexible working hours or working from home.

Having someone look out for you and knowing what to do in an emergency might also be a reason to disclose if you have bleeding symptoms. You might need to discuss what to do if there is an accident or injury. You can start by explaining that you're able to look after minor cuts and bruises, but for something more serious you may need their help. Explain that if there is a head injury or other serious knock an ambulance should be called, and you should be taken to hospital. Tell them this is important even if there is no sign of blood, because unseen bleeding inside the head or body can cause serious problems. Let someone know if you have an ABDR patient card so they can show it to the paramedics (ambulance drivers) or emergency department staff. An ABDR patient card has your bleeding disorder, treatment details and your Haemophilia Treatment Centre (HTC) contact details on it – talk to your HTC about getting one if you have bleeding symptoms.

*“ I told my current boss who knows I'm a carrier as she was asking if I knew about my son's condition before he was born. She has been supportive and lets me have a phone in case I get called as I explained that if the hospital calls then I have to go. ”*



## Susie's story

Susie is not new to telling others about her bleeding disorder. As someone with von Willebrand disease, and as a parent of a child with VWD, she has had to advocate for herself and for him on occasion. But after an accident at work she realised there could be times when she might have to rely on others to do the talking for her.

'I fell down the stairs at work. When I came to a stop I realised I couldn't move. I couldn't call out. I could barely even breathe.' Work colleagues came to her aid. They acted quickly and worked through what had happened and what she might need. As the plans progressed and it became clear that she needed medical assistance, the value of disclosure became clear. Susie's manager, who was also the section's first aid officer, already knew what was important in this situation.

'My manager and I had already had many conversations about VWD. We'd talked about my son with type 3. She had supported me when

I needed to take time out for appointments and when I'd needed to field calls from my son's teachers. And these conversations weren't intrusive. They were caring, based on the facts of my situation, my needs at the time and on her needing to know what might be required of her in just such a situation.'

These conversations formed the basis for her manager's quick actions. 'My manager knew to take the extra step of calling the HTC. She spoke with the Haemophilia Nurse to report my injuries and work out a plan.'

Susie had always thought of her conversations with her manager as a way of looking after her own needs. It was later she realised that it was also about looking after her manager. 'By having these conversations I was helping her to do her job properly.' Disclosing at work allowed Susie to gain valuable emotional support but it also made the difference when she couldn't speak up at a vital moment.

'I had already learned to be my own best advocate. But crucially, sometimes you need to plan and have contingencies for others to advocate for you.'



Before you disclose at work, it's important to judge what response you think your employer will have. If you work for a large organisation there should be workplace policies in place that you can check to get an idea of the organisation's approach and the level of support you can expect. If you work for a smaller organisation that does not have clearly stated policies it can be a bit harder to know how the news will be received.

Before disclosing, you could consider getting the help of your doctor, the social worker or counsellor or other health professionals at your HTC, or your union if you think your boss will react negatively, or if you just want some pointers. There are numerous state/territory and federal laws that protect against discrimination in the workplace if you disclose your status and are treated unfairly because of it.

However, some preparation and experienced advice might help you avoid a negative situation occurring.

If your bleeding disorder is not going to impact on your work, you may prefer to take your time and think carefully before you tell your employer or workmates. Remember – once you have told people, you can't take it back and you will have little control over who they tell.

“ Take time to sit people down and explain that firstly this is personal... that you are not embarrassed or upset you simply want them to understand what it means and what to do if an emergency arises. ”

## Tina's story



**D**eciding whether to tell work about having a bleeding disorder can be tricky. If you do decide to let them know – when and how do you do it? Tina found out the hard way that sometimes it requires a bit of preparation.

Her first experience of telling her employer arose after she had an accident at work. Up until then work wasn't aware she had a bleeding disorder. 'I had to tell work because I had haemorrhaged and had to leave. I was branded "unreliable". Then I had to have a week off because I was passing clots the size of my fist which my boss knew about because it was happening at work. Despite medical certificates my boss decided I was not committed. I was on a short term contract which wasn't renewed so I lost my job'.

Once Tina got the medical care she needed from the Haemophilia Treatment Centre she was much better prepared to deal with it, and to talk about it in her next job. 'It turned out I was anaemic and was put on tranexamic acid [treatment in tablet form]. I got better once I knew what was going on. I was able to explain it to my current boss, and she knows it's under control. She has been supportive and understands that if my son has a bleed I need to leave'.

Taking steps to look after herself and getting the information she needed was a turning point for Tina. 'You need to be educated about the condition so you can educate. If you can explain it's less scary'.