

CHANGES TO THE SICK NOTE – From ‘Sick Note to Fit Note’

You may already be aware of changes to the standard sick note following a national publicity campaign. The Statement of Fitness for Work, or 'fit note', is a new Medical Statement that GPs will issue from 6 April 2010. It replaces the old 'sick note' and aims to focus on what an employee may be able to do at work rather than what they cannot do.

What's different about the new fit note?

In the past GPs have either said that 'you should refrain from work' or 'you need not refrain from work'. The fit note offers a new option - 'may be fit for work taking account of the following advice'.

Where a doctor has advised that the employee **may be fit** for work they will include some comments on their patient's condition and, where appropriate, will tick one or more of the four tick boxes on the Statement. These are common ways to help someone with a health condition return to work and would usually be temporary measures until they were back to full good health. The tick boxes are:

- **Phased return to work** - a gradual increase in the intensity of work duties working hours
- **Altered hours** – a temporary change to hours worked. This does not necessarily mean working fewer hours e.g. change to start/end times, flexibility in when hours are worked over the course of a week
- **Amended duties** – temporarily changing duties and tasks to take into account the employee's condition e.g. removing heavy lifting for employees recovering from back injury
- **Workplace adaptations** – making physical changes to the workplace to take the condition into account e.g. changes to access to the building, new equipment

What should I do if the GP has ticked ‘may be fit for work’?

The statement and the options to consider which may enable an employee to return to work made by the GP are not binding. There is no requirement to implement the advice if it is not possible.

What is important is to meet with the employee to discuss the GP advice and whether any of the above adjustments can realistically and reasonably be made. This will depend on individual circumstances but the adjustments necessary to enable the employee to return to work should be considered in light of potential impact on residents, level of service and cost implications in particular.

If it is decided that it is not possible to make such adjustments, this should be explained and confirmed to the employee. The Fit Note should then be used as if the doctor had advised 'not fit for work' and you should follow usual Abbeyfield procedures. The employee does not need to return to their doctor for a new Statement to confirm this.

Further guidance

The Sickness Absence policy and procedure has been amended in light of the changes and further guidance covering different scenarios has been added. You can also find information at

www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote and of course, you can contact the HR team to discuss specific circumstances on 01727 857 536.