From Sick Note to Fit Note

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On the 6th April 2010 the sick note changed to become a fit note (Statement of Fitness to Work)

Evidence shows that work is generally good for your health and that often going back to work can actually aid a person’s recovery. On the other hand, staying off work can lead to long-term absence and job loss with the risk of isolation, loss of confidence, mental health issues, de-skilling and social exclusion. The new fit note can help. Doctors are able to advise people who are on sick leave for over 7 days whether, with extra support from their employer, they could return to work earlier.

(www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote)
From Sick Notes to Fit Notes

What changed?

• The removal of the fit for work option
• A new option for a doctor to advise if an employee may be fit for work with some support
• More space for a doctor to provide information on how an employee’s condition will affect what they do
• Tick boxes for doctors to use to suggest common ways to help a return to work
• Inclusion of telephone consultations as an acceptable form of assessment
• A reduction in the maximum duration of Statement during the first six months of illness to three months
The key findings of the report were:

• Almost all (99%) of GPs thought that work was beneficial for health and that helping patients to stay in or return to work was an important part of the GPs role.

• 96% agreed that worklessness is generally detrimental to people’s health.

• The majority of GPS reported positive impacts of the ‘fit note’ on the quality of consultations and outcomes for patients.

• Respondents were evenly split on whether the introduction of the fit note had lengthened consultation times.

• The majority of GPs reported an absence of good services locally to which they could refer patients for support or advice about return to work.

• A minority of GPs reported that they had received training in work and health within the past 12 months.
What Are The Problems?

• Not being correctly completed or used e.g. sample of 46 ‘fit notes’, 35 stated ‘not fit for work’, 9 ‘fit with adaptations’ but none given. Only TWO ticked ‘fit with adaptations’ and recommendations given.

• Of a sample of 33 GP’s all felt unsure of how to use the fit note and many felt it compromised the patient/doctor relationship

• Employers have been clear that reliable legible fit notes would be extremely helpful to them. They want to understand when an employee is unable to work and when they can be helped back to work with adjustments, but many complain that the fit notes are often illegible, not properly filled-out and not independent (GPs are accountable to their patients but not to the employer or state).

• Companies without OH still unsure how to make use of the fit note and may be inclined to wait until ‘fully fit’ to allow a return or ignore the fit note altogether as in this example….
Example: New Statement of Fitness

Statement of Fitness for Work
For social security or Statutory Sick Pay

Patient's name
Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms

Assessed by: 17/15/2010

I assessed your case on: 17/15/2010

Stress

I advise you that:

[ ] you are not fit for work.
[ ] you may be fit for work taking account
of the following advice:

If available, and with your employer's agreement, you may benefit from:

[ ] a phased return to work
[ ] amended duties
[ ] altered hours
[ ] workplace adaptations

Additional functional effects of your condition:

Sallie finds it increasingly difficult to cope with normal working hours as well as study leave, and to compensate, she works overtime outside of normal working hours. She feels that this added stress is causing her anxiety and may prevent her from doing her best work.

This will be the case for:
16 weeks

I will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period.

[ ] Please delete as applicable.

Dr. B. King
9 Main Road
Manchester, M22 9BL
Tel: 0161 262 1234

Date of statement
14/5/2010

Dr. B. King

Date of statement
3/6/110

Doctor's signature

Doctor's address

Med 3 04/10
What Are The Solutions?

- Encourage more doctors to make use of the training available to them on fit notes (RCGP offers a half day course for GP’s)
- The HSE ‘Managing Sickness Absence and Return to Work’ document from 2006 needs to be updated to include information on the fit note for employers
- Companies should ensure their managers and supervisors receive adequate training on absence management including how to use the new fit note
- More availability of OH advice to companies and GP surgeries to provide the link between GP and the workplace
Early Intervention is Key

• The sooner action is taken, the better the chances are of an employee making a full and speedy return to work

• Once an employee has been off sick for more than six weeks, the problem is often compounded and the chances of returning to work at all are significantly reduced, by 6 months 80% will never return

• Work in a well-managed workplace is a treatment for people recovering from sickness absence and an early return to work improves both mental and physical recovery

• Simple adjustments can enable workers to return to work safely before their symptoms completely disappear

• Workers can normally return before they are 100% fit (all of the above - HSE ‘Managing sickness absence and return to work’ 2006)

• OH works closely with GP’s, employers and employees to explain the use of Statements of Fitness (‘Fit Notes’) and communicate the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation
Any Questions?

Questions are guaranteed in life; Answers aren’t.