

Fit Notes

A guide for Hospital Doctors

Summary

This briefing describes the process which hospital doctors should follow when their patients require a fit note.

The paper also provides guidance on the process general practitioners should follow when fit notes have not been issued by the hospital for their patients.

Background

The revised Med 3 (medical certificate of fitness for work or “Statement of Fitness for Work” or fit note) Form was introduced across Great Britain on 6th April 2010. The revised form enables doctors to certify the advice given to their patients about their fitness for work.

Whilst patients are often issued with Med 10s (medical certificate of inpatient stay) on leaving hospital, many hospital doctors are unaware that they are able and should instead issue a Med 3 when appropriate.

Key national requirements as set out in the NHS Standard Contract for NHS Acute Trusts for 2017-19 stipulate that it is important that fit notes are issued to patients in a way which is convenient for them and which is efficient in the use of clinical staff time.

Where there is an appropriate opportunity (whether on discharge from hospital, within the emergency department or in clinic) provider clinicians must issue fit notes to appropriate patients, and their organisations must enable this, rather than expecting patients to make a separate appointment to see their GP simply for this purpose.

The contract also requires that fit notes cover an appropriate period, that is, until the patient is expected to be fit for work (following surgery, for example) or until a further clinical review, if required.

Issue

Thousands of appointments and telephone calls with GPs are taken up each year by patients requesting fit notes when they could have actually been issued by the hospital doctors providing treatment at the time.

In many cases it is the hospital doctor who is best placed to give advice on a patient’s fitness for work.

Not issuing Med 3s denies patients the best care and leads to unnecessary duplication and extra work for GPs.

Expected Process

The duty to provide a Med 3 rests with the doctor who at the time has clinical responsibility for the patient.

On discharge from hospital the doctor should provide the patient, if appropriate, with a Med 3 to cover a forward period. Med 3 forms can be found in the controlled drugs cupboard.

The process hospital doctors should follow when discharging patients from hospital who will require a fit note, to avoid unnecessary referrals to GPs solely for the purpose of sickness certification, is as follows;

For hospital in-patients;

- Where no follow up is required – A Med 3 should be issued by the hospital doctor and should cover the entire period the patient is expected to be required to be off work according to the clinical circumstances.
- Where a follow up appointment at the Hospital is required – A Med 3 should be issued by the hospital doctor and should cover the entire period the patient is expected to be required to be off work according to the clinical circumstances. The Fit Note can be edited and timescales amended by the hospital doctor if appropriate upon review.
- Where a follow up appointment with patient's GP is required – A Med 3 should be issued by the hospital doctor and should cover the entire period the patient is expected to be required to be off work according to the clinical circumstances. The Fit Note can be edited and timescales amended by the patient's GP, if appropriate, on review.

For hospital out-patients;

For an out-patient this will generally be the hospital doctor, except where the GP retains responsibility (for example where the patient has been referred to a hospital for advice and guidance rather than an appointment)

In cases where the hospital clinician retains the responsibility for the incapacitating condition the treating clinician should issue any subsequent Med 3s for an appropriate forward period.

For patients being discharged from the Emergency Department;

Patients are able to self-certify for a period of up to seven days in any illness.

If it is anticipated that the illness with which they have attended the Emergency Department will require more than seven days off work, the process above should be used. Where it is anticipated that a patient would be fit to work within seven days, no Med 3 issue is required and patients should be advised to self-certify. If after this period, they are unexpectedly unfit to return to work, patients are advised to contact their GP for further advice

It is good practice for clinic or discharge letters to GPs to make clear where fit notes have been issued by the provider, the reasons given and the exact dates covered.

Process to follow in Community

Guidance for GPs when a patient needing a Med 3 is discharged from hospital without one:

Between 1st February 2019 and 31st March 2019, to allow for sufficient time for this communication to be embedded into clinical practice and to avoid significant disruption to patients, we ask that you continue with your current process for managing these issues. Please also raise a Yellow Card including your patient's hospital number and details of the discharging speciality. This will be submitted to University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust where issues of non-compliance with this briefing note will be followed up.

From 1st April 2019, please do not issue the Med 3. We ask that patients are directed to the Hospital's PALS Team who will ensure the Med 3 is issued by the discharging speciality team. The PALS Team can be contacted via 01752 439884 or 01752 432564. Alternatively, patients can email the team at plh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

Glossary of Terms

Med 10 certificates are required for statutory pay purposes to cover any period that a patient is in hospital.

Med 3 certificates are required for statutory pay purposes for patients who are either incapable of work or whom may be fit for work with support from their employer. The duty to provide a Med 3 rests with the doctor who at the time has clinical responsibility for the patient. A sample of a Med 3 form can be found below;

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

Patient's name

I assessed your case on:

and, because of the following condition(s):

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

Comments, including functional effects of your condition(s):

This will be the case for
or from to

I will/will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period.
(Please delete as applicable)

Doctor's signature

Date of statement

Doctor's address

Med 3 04/10

For the patient – what to do now

Please read the notes below then fill in your details and sign and date the declaration. If you cannot fill in your details yourself, ask someone else to do it for you.

What your doctor's advice means

Not fit for work:

Your doctor will advise this when they believe that your health condition means you should refrain from work for the stated period of time.

May be fit for work taking account of the following advice:

Your doctor will recommend this when they believe that you may be able to return to work with some support from your employer. Sometimes it may not be possible for your employer to act on the doctor's advice and you will not be able to return to work until you have further recovered. You do not need to get a further Statement from your doctor to confirm this.

If you are employed

If you are not fit for work, or your employer cannot support your return to work, your employer should consider paying Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) based on the information provided. If SSP cannot be paid, or your SSP is ending, your employer will give you form SSP1 to claim social security benefits. If you are self-employed, you may be able to claim social security benefits because of your health condition.

Social security benefit claimants

If you are claiming social security benefits because of your health condition, send this form to your Jobcentre Plus office. If you are claiming social security benefits for any other reason, you should contact a Personal Adviser to discuss the advice on the form. If you do any work you must inform Jobcentre Plus of your change of circumstances.

If you want to make a new claim to social security benefits you can:

- download a claim form at www.direct.gov.uk/benefits, or
- phone 0800 055 6688 (8am to 6pm Monday to Friday). Textphone users call 0800 023 4888.

Your details – Please use BLOCK CAPITALS

Surname

Other names

Address

Postcode

Date of birth

National Insurance (NI) number

Declaration
I agree that my doctor may give the Department for Work and Pensions or a healthcare professional acting on its behalf any information which is needed to deal with my claim for benefit or any subsequent award.

Signature

Date

If you have signed this form for someone else, please tick here:

References

The interface between primary and secondary care: Key messages for NHS clinicians and managers guidance published by NHS England in July 2017.

Further guidance on the new Statement of Fitness for Work can be found at:
www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote.

Production

Interface Working Group, University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust.

Issue Date	Version
8 th February 2019	V1