



MINDFUL EMPLOYER[®]

Requesting a Doctor's Report

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REQUESTING A DOCTOR'S REPORT

At the 2006 Working for Health conferences employers and doctors both highlighted the need for better communication. Requests by employers for medical reports from GPs were one of the many issues discussed.

This paper offers some suggestions and ideas for employers about what to include in such requests.

Be clear and specific

It is important to request relevant information without overburdening the GP. Letters to doctors should provide the GP with clear and specific information and contain clear and specific questions, in order to provide you, as the employer, with a clear and specific response.

Provide information

State why you writing - e.g. '(name) has been off sick since (date) due to (reason shown on medical certificate). S/he is a valued member of staff and we would like to know how best we can support them at this time.'

The GP may only be aware of certificated sickness absences. Therefore it may also be helpful to give any broader context to the current absence - e.g. 'In the last 12 months s/he has had 'x' days self/uncertificated sick absence because of (conditions).'

Give a brief overview of your employee's job tasks and the context in which they work (e.g. the working environment; alone or in a team [large or small]). Include a copy of the employee's job description.

You are not asking the GP for a full occupational health report.

Request information

Ask questions such as: 'Do you think they will be able to return to work by ... (give specific date).'

State your reason for asking - e.g. 'having this information will be helpful to us in planning staff cover.'

Ask the doctor to help you think about putting support in place - for example, questions such as:

- 'Will they be able to return to full duties straight away or would a gradual/phased return be helpful?'
- 'If a gradual/phased return is recommended, would you advise reduced hours or/& lighter/amended duties?'
- 'If lighter/amended duties, what aspects of their job should they avoid and for how long?'
- 'What other reasonable adjustments should we make in order to enable them to continue working in this role?'

If appropriate to the employee, you may wish to ask very specific questions relating the reason for absence to the job tasks. For example:

- 'Will they be to lift (state maximum weight), drive (state type of vehicle, distances), sit for long periods (give duration; would a special chair be helpful?)' etc.
- 'Are there side-effects from any medication that we need to be aware of in relation to their job?'
- 'Is there a likelihood of relapse and if so what can we do to help prevent this?'

Bear in mind that the GP may not be able to provide exact and precise answers.

Other things to include

- After the salutation (Dear Dr..) write the employee's name, home address and date of birth - this can assist the GP in locating records.
- Include a signed statement giving the employee's consent for you to write to their doctor and for the GP to respond. See 'Employee Consent' below.
- Copy the letter to the employee.
- The GP may charge you for the report. As well as offering to pay this fee also offer a named contact for the GP to speak to by telephone if they prefer to (subject to the employee's agreement).
- Ask the GP to reply by a specific date – but also see 'Employee Consent' below.

Don't...

- Ask the employee to ask their doctor for a medical report.
- Write 'please provide a medical report' and nothing else.

EMPLOYEE CONSENT

Employees may have concerns about you wanting a medical report and GPs may be concerned that patients have felt forced into signing for information to be released.

The Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 provides the right for people to withhold consent and also to ask to see the report before it is sent by the GP to their employer. For more information visit http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1988/Ukpga_19880028_en_1.htm

From the date an employer asks for a report, an employee has 21 days in which to make arrangements with the GP to see the report. This right, important as it is for both employee and (through allowing time within a busy workload to write it) the GP, can of course potentially lead to further extension of the sickness absence. Negotiating a speedier response will often be helpful.

Example of consent

N.B. The following is purely an example: please use your own wording.

(company name) is seeking your consent to apply for a report giving information about your state of health. The content of any medical report is confidential and is made known only to (e.g. Personnel/Occupational health). You are not obliged to give your consent to such an application being made but doing so will help us to make decisions with you and to support you in your employment. Your doctor will be asked to send the report direct to (Occupational Health Advisor or Personnel Manager) where it will be held confidentially.

This part is to be completed by you and returned to (name, title and address of employer contact).

I have been informed of my statutory rights under the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 and hereby consent to my employer requesting a report giving medical information regarding my current ill health and medical history from a doctor who has been responsible for my physical or mental health care.

I understand that this consent form will be copied to that doctor and shall have the validity of the original.

I do/do not wish to see the report before it is sent to my employer. *Delete as appropriate*

Name of my Doctor

Address

Signed

Date

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Since this conference the Statement of Fitness for Work (Fit Note) has replaced the 'Sick note' which provides GPs with a facility to provide employers with further guidance. Guidance about the use of Fit Notes can be found at www.mindfulemployer.net