



Fit Notes - In the Spotlight

17 Feb 2010

6 April 2010 will herald a new regime in managing employee sickness absence with the introduction of the "Statement of Fitness for Work" or "Fit Note" as it is more commonly called. Fit notes will replace the current incapacity certificates which have been around in their present format since the 1920s in an attempt to reduce the incidence and costs of workplace absence. As the name suggests, the new regime focuses on encouraging employers and employees to work towards an early return to work in appropriate circumstances.

The New Regime

Under the new regime GPs will have two options to choose from when assessing their patients. These are either:

- "You are not fit for work"; or
- "You may be fit for work taking into account the following advice".

Where an employee is certified as not fit for work, the GP will state the period of incapacity and whether the employee will need to be assessed again at the end of that period. This means that provided the employee is fit to return to work at the end of that period, he or she will not need to return to their GP before returning to work.

Where an employee is assessed as being fit for some work, the GP is required to specify whether the employee would be assisted by:

- A phased return to work;
- Amended duties;
- Altered hours; or
- Workplace adaptations.

There is additional space on the form for the GP to make any specific comments about the employee's health, the effects of this or the adjustment suggested. The GP is also required to give an indication of how long the adjustment will need to remain in place.

A sample of the new Fit Note is available here: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/med3-fitnote->

[sample.pdf](#)

The other changes the Regulations introduce are:

- In the first six months of a health condition, the maximum period a GP can issue a fit note for is 3 months (reduced from 6 months);
- Only GPs can issue fit notes although it is proposed that this will be extended to other healthcare professionals in the future;
- The certificates will be in electronic format (usually printed) which should assist with legibility issues often associated with the current sick notes.

Anticipated Issues

As with any new regime, the fit note system will take some time to develop and for employers, employees and GPs to familiarise themselves with it. Below are some of the issues we anticipate will arise. To view this article in full please click [here](#)

If this raises any issues for your organisation, please do speak to your usual contact in the Mace & Jones employment and HR team in Liverpool: 0151 236 8989 or Manchester: 0161 214 0500.

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