

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE

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SHORT TERM SICKNESS CERTIFICATION

NHS GPs are not obliged to issue sickness certificates for illnesses lasting less than one week. They may, at a patient's request issue a private certificate for illnesses of less than one week's duration, but with an ever-increasing workload, the vast majority of GPs are not prepared to do this.

The Government has recognised that attendance by patients at GPs' surgeries for the purpose of obtaining short-term sickness certificates has a negative impact on the ability of other patients to access their GPs. The Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit has issued two reports on reducing the burden of paperwork for GPs and has made strong recommendations that GPs should not be involved in issuing short-term sickness certificates.

Any employer has a need to police sickness absence amongst its workforce and different organisations will do this in different ways. The employer may set up its own occupational health service or may buy services from a commercial occupational health provider. Some GPs may be prepared to write reports at the employer's request, with the employee's written consent, about illnesses for which the patient has consulted them. The current fee for such a report tends to be in the range of £40-£60.

South Staffordshire LMC will give its full support to any practice that does not wish to be involved in policing another organisation's sickness absence and reminds all employers, in the strongest possible terms, that they are not entitled to expect GPs to issue non statutory certificates.

This advice from the LMC may be freely copied and given to patients or their employers as required.

Dr David Dickson
LMC Secretary