

To: NHS Trust chief executives (via 'the week')
Supply manager, NHS secure forms
Medical directors, NHS Trusts

Copied: Monitor (via 'the week')

4 March 2010

Integrating the Statement of Fitness for Work into Hospital Sickness Certification Processes

Dear colleagues

From **6 April 2010** a new Statement of Fitness for Work (also known as the Form Med 3 or "fit note") will be introduced across Scotland, England and Wales which will enable doctors to give their patients better advice about returning to work.

Where appropriate a Medical Statement should be provided by the doctor who, at the time, has clinical responsibility for the patient. This is usually the GP. However, where a hospital doctor has clinical responsibility they should assume responsibility for the patient's sickness certification needs. The failure to do this leads to patients unnecessarily visiting their GPs and explaining their health condition to a doctor who is less familiar with their recent medical history. This does not benefit the patient or the GP as, in many cases, it is the hospital doctor who is best placed to advise the patient on their fitness for work.

Through analysis of hospitals' ordering histories, it is clear that many hospital doctors are not aware that they should be issuing Med 3s. This is despite a previous communication from the Chief Operating Officer of the Department of Health that requested NHS chief executives take steps to integrate sickness certification into hospital discharge and out-patient procedure.¹

The launch of the revised Medical Statement presents an ideal opportunity to address this and ensure that all hospital doctors have access to the revised form and understand its purpose. Therefore, we are asking you to ensure that the relevant medical staff within your Trust are made aware of the need to issue Med 3s and also the changes to the Med 3 that are coming into effect in April.

To aid this we have enclosed a brief guide which explains the new Statement and highlights the role of hospital doctors in the sickness certification process. It would be appreciated if you would draw this to the attention of your staff.

¹ Letter of 31 July 2001 from Neil McKay, DH Chief Operating Officer, to Chief Executives of NHS Trusts
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4013798.pdf

As many English hospitals and Trusts have not ordered these forms before we are also taking this opportunity to send supply managers a box of the new form to distribute to their hospitals in time for the 6 April launch date. I would also like to enlist your help in ensuring that the revised forms and information about them is cascaded to the relevant personnel within your hospitals.

After this initial distribution, hospitals or Trusts will be able to order the new forms direct from iON, the distributor. Further details on this process can be found at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/catalogue-of-information/how-to-order-products/>

Further information on the Statement of Fitness for Work is available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/healthcare-professional/news/statement-of-fitness-for-work.shtml>

In the meantime, if you have any questions please email the DWP policy team at dwphealthandwork.enq@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Gunnyeon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr Bill Gunnyeon
DWP Chief Medical Adviser