



# Cleveland Local Medical Committee

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## LETTERS/STD/CERTIFICATION-STUDENTS

Date:.....

### To: Schools and Colleges in Cleveland and surrounding areas

Dear Sir / Madam,

#### **Re: Requests for Short-Term Medical Certification and / or Medical Evidence to Support Authorised Absence Due to Illness – Pupils / Students**

It is the responsibility of schools (not parents) to decide whether a pupil absence should be marked as authorised or unauthorised. Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as justification for absence.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance relating to the marking of registers for illness and medical appointments states:

#### *Code I: Illness (not medical or dental appointments)*

*Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise absences due to illness unless they have genuine cause for concern about the legitimacy of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can request parents to provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness but should advise parents of their intention. **Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily.** Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes.*

GPs receive a significant number of requests for sickness certificates or appointment cards for school children. For many years Cleveland LMC has maintained a policy on short-term medical certification which was widely circulated among GPs. Our Policy has not changed; GPs are not obliged to issue certificates for periods of sickness of 7 days or less and should a GP provide such certification, the GP is entitled to charge a patient whatever they deem appropriate for a short term certificate. However, NHS GPs do not relish the prospect of charging patients, especially where the provision of such a certificate is a requirement of the patient's school or college. Therefore, GPs do not provide sick notes for school children.

When children are absent from school owing to illness, schools may request a letter from a parent or guardian. Where this includes sickness during an exam period, or if the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, schools could request that parents provide medical evidence (not a doctor's sick note) as per the DfE guidance above. GPs cannot provide retrospective sickness certification. When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist.

GPs, unfortunately, will not sign sickness certificates for less than the statutory requirement and should not be asked for appointments for children that do not need to see the doctor. With the increasing number of commitments of GPs, they have no wish to waste valuable surgery time seeing patients suffering from minor, self-limiting illnesses, or those capable of self-treatment, simply to enable the provision of an appointment card or to be asked to provide a sick note.

It is estimated that a potential 47,000 appointments could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in issuing sickness certification. However, where a pupil has excessive absence due to illness and the school has concerns, they should contact the school nurse for assistance and support for the pupil.

This policy is in accord with reports from the Government encouraging the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy in general practices and improved utilisation of GP time.

Your student has asked for a short term medical certificate and the doctor has, quite reasonably, declined to issue this to his patient. The LMC's position on this question is quite clear. It is not part of a GP's job to police students' attendance at school or college. If schools or colleges require medical advice, arrangements exist in the maintained sector through the local school medical service; those in the independent sector should have their own arrangements. Leaving it to students to trouble their GP for these purposes during normal surgery hours is a waste of NHS time and resources, and is a practice which we accordingly disapprove.

We regret if this policy causes inconvenience to you, but feel that the proper channels should be used rather than making inappropriate use of the General Practitioner service.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J Foster', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ms J Foster  
Chief Executive