

Improving health through work

An update for GPs on
health and work policy
and projects

02 Improving health through work

Dear Colleague

It is once again a pleasure to provide an update on progress around the health and work agenda to coincide with the RCGP Annual Conference. The past year has seen continuing significant developments in this area and I hope that the information in the pages that follow will be of both interest and help to you.

Building on the GP attitudes survey published last year, which showed that most GPs agree with the principle that work is generally good for health and well-being, we have recently published findings from more detailed qualitative research with GPs and with employers and employees. This research shows that work is being discussed more frequently during consultations, and that the fit note is increasingly being used as a tool to help with this. We have included a summary of the findings for interest. I am very grateful to all those GPs who have willingly taken part in our various pieces of research.

It is hard to believe of course that the fit note has now been with us for over two and a half years. When it was launched we committed to creating a computer generated version and we have been working since then with IT suppliers to GP practices to develop this capability. I am delighted to report that the first of the suppliers, covering approximately 50 per cent of GPs across Great Britain, started rolling out the capability in July, and the remaining suppliers will be working to complete roll out by early 2013. I hope you will find this new capability helpful in improving the support you give to your patients.

Many GPs have told me that although they understand the sickness certification system well, the benefits system remains a mystery. We have provided a link for you to a simple guide we produced last year for GPs and

I would commend it to you. The welfare landscape is of course changing with the introduction next year of both Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment. We have provided some information on both these new benefits and will look to provide more detail as we get closer to their introduction.

There is almost continual media focus on the Work Capability Assessment and I know many GPs have patients for whom they feel the assessment may not have produced the best outcome. At the same time many others feel that often the outcome is the right one even though their patient may not consider it so. We recognise that we have to work to continually improve the assessment and the process surrounding it and we have provided some brief information on work in this area. I am very grateful to all those GPs who provide information to the Department to help us to ensure that the decision that is reached takes account of all the relevant evidence.

Helping people wherever possible and appropriate to participate in the world of work is important but challenging. There is no doubt that we are seeing a gradual but progressive change in culture and behaviour in relation to health and work and GPs have been leading the way across the medical profession. I know we have a long way still to go but I remain incredibly grateful for the support and encouragement that GP colleagues have given as together we strive to produce the best outcomes for patients.



Dr Bill Gunnyne CBE FFOM FRCP FRCGP
Chief Medical Adviser
Department for Work and Pensions

Evaluating the fit note: latest update

Feedback from employers, patients and GPs

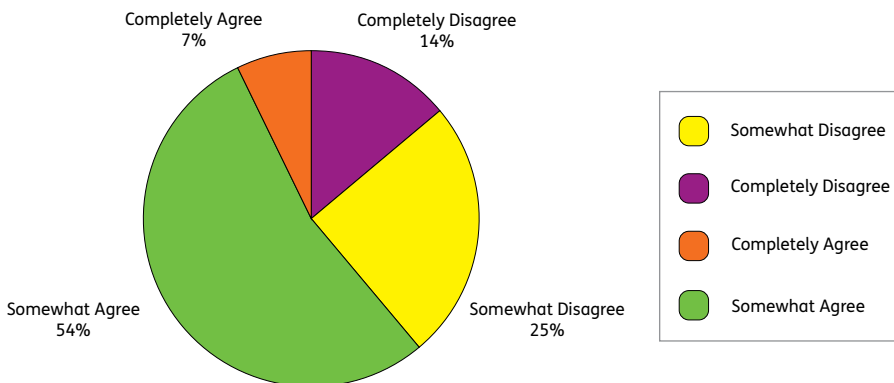
Our ongoing programme of research is helping us to understand how we can support you to use the fit note to its full potential. The selected findings here, demonstrate points of good practice and areas for improvement. A diverse range of views were expressed and these findings do not necessarily represent all GP, employer and patient views.

GPs told us:

- You are using the fit note as a tool to initiate and guide your consultations with patients about returning to work, and it has had a positive impact on the quality of your discussions.
- The fit note has helped you to challenge patients' perceptions of their ability to work and to be more assertive about the need to explore return-to-work options.
- The fit note has helped patients to make a phased return to work.

So initially I treated them like old-style sick notes and ticked an awful lot of 'You're not fit to work' and used them as a kind of black and white thing and then gradually, over a period of time, I started thinking 'Hold on, this is a bit richer and I could be using it a different way'. (GP)

'The fit note has improved the quality of my discussions with patients about return to work'



Source: Hann & Sibbald (2011).

Evaluating the Fit Note: latest update

The findings also suggested that you would find it useful to have further advice on:

- How and when to use ‘you may be fit for work taking account of the following advice’.
- Distinguishing between and using the four return-to-work tick boxes.
- The level of detail to include on the fit note.
- When to use which date sections and how to use the section ‘I will/will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period’.

Employers and patients told us:

- Employers wanted to see more use of the ‘may be fit for work’ option.
- Employers wanted clearer and more complete information on the nature of incapacity and the employee’s functional capabilities
- The fit note had challenged employers’ assumptions that people with a health condition cannot work.
- The fit note had helped patients agree changes with their employer and empowered them to agree a return to work.

‘We didn’t previously make adjustments. They [employees] just said, “we are off sick so we can’t return to work”...I am saying it [fit note] helps a lot more now and I would like to see more people having come back with adjustments.’ (Employer)

‘I think he [their GP] was very helpful actually and having spoken to him I actually felt better about going back to work and just doing what I could, and then just taking the odd day off here and there to rest my hand when I needed to’. (Employee)

Further research

Further evidence from the programme of research will be available by spring 2013. The research findings outlined above will be used to inform the revised guidance from the department that will be available later in the year. They will also help inform other available sources of information – for example, the Healthy Working UK website, the Royal College of General Practitioners half-day workshop and e-learning modules for those in Primary and Secondary Care.

The electronic fit note (eMed 3)

DWP are working with NHS Connecting for Health, the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the various suppliers of GP IT systems to roll out an electronic version of the fit note (eMed 3). The roll out started for some GP Practices in July 2012, and should be completed by early 2013.

The electronic fit note will be integrated into your Practice's existing IT system.

What will the electronic fit note mean for GPs?

The electronic fit note will allow you to:

- complete it on your computer and print it out to give to your patient
- save and store information included in the fit note to your patient's record
- use the information collected for internal audit within your surgery, and
- transfer coded information via GP2GP (where available)

Other additional features include:

- improved anti-fraud measures such as a system-generated barcode on every printed fit note, and
- national data collection to inform sickness certification practice and policy on health and work

Your IT supplier will contact your Practice prior to the introduction of the capability on your system, and will provide information and training on the technical aspects of the electronic fit note.

There are no changes to the rules for issuing fit notes.

The benefits

You will be able to:

- pre-populate the electronic fit note with patient information, such as their address, saving you time
- refer to previous discussions about fitness for work when reviewing your patients in the future
- share examples of fit notes within your Practice that reflect good practice and audit your certification practice

Further information can be found at www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote

Revising the fit note guidance

Later this year we will publish revised fit note guidance for GPs, employers and individuals

The fit note, or Statement of Fitness for Work, has been in place since April 2010, as has the guidance to support its introduction. The original guidance was used to inform GPs, employers and individuals of the changes introduced and the importance of discussing work during consultations.

The revised guidance will continue to do this, but will be more focussed on ensuring there is understanding of the importance of using the fit note to its maximum potential.

The general approach taken in revising the guidance has been to ensure that

it reflects the changes that have taken place over the past two years, the roll out of the electronic fit note, and the feedback that has been received from research and from discussions with GPs and employers. The guidance will also include more useful case studies to highlight how the fit note can be used to optimise the benefit to patients.

As before, DWP are grateful for the support of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association as we develop the revised guidance.

When the revised guidance has been published, it will be available on the DWP website – www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote

Guide to benefit system for GPs

Last year, in response to requests from GPs, DWP produced a short guide specifically for GPs on the benefit system. The guide includes information on the main benefits your patients may claim as well as information on the support and guidance available for GPs and the support available to patients through Jobcentre Plus. The guide can be found online at:

www.dwp.gov.uk/healthcare-professional/guidance

Training and Support for GPs

National Education Programme	Healthy Working UK
<p>The RCGP deliver a half-day workshop on how to manage a patient's work and health issues. Find out more and book a place on a workshop at: www.rcgp.org.uk/courses-and-events/health-and-work-in-general-practice-events.aspx</p>	<p>www.healthyworkinguk.co.uk is a website for GPs and other healthcare professionals providing access to information, guidance and training on the management of health and work; including a fit note guide and a fit for work decision aid.</p>
Occupational health advice	Fit for Work Service
<p>GPs can access free, professional, and confidential occupational health advice in relation to individual patient issues as well as general occupational health queries. The service is available in England, Scotland and Wales.</p> <p>England – Health for Work Adviceline: 0800 0 77 88 44 www.health4work.nhs.uk</p> <p>Scotland – Healthy Working Lives Advice line: 0800 019 22 11 www.healthyworkinglives.com</p> <p>Wales – Health at Work Advice Line Wales: 0800 107 0900 www.healthyworkingwales.com</p>	<p>The Fit for Work Services provide case-managed, multidisciplinary support to employees in the early stages of sickness absence. You can refer patients to the services at no cost to your practice.</p> <p>These pilot services operate in Greater Manchester, Kensington and Chelsea (including Hammersmith, Fulham, and Westminster), Leicestershire, North Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire, Rhyl, and Scotland.</p> <p>Visit www.dwp.gov.uk/health-work-and-well-being/our-work/fit-for-work-services for contact details, and more information about the pilot nearest to you.</p>

The Sickness Absence Review

In November last year Dame Carol Black, then National Director for Health and Work, and David Frost, former Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, published their major review of the sickness absence system in Great Britain. The key purpose of the Review was to make recommendations to help people wherever possible to stay in work through periods of ill health, whilst ensuring those too sick to work receive support quickly.

The review presented an important analysis of the:

- sickness absence system in the UK;
- impact of sickness absence on employers, the State and individuals; and
- factors which cause and prolong sickness absence and which, in too many cases, mean that employees move out of work entirely and on to benefits.

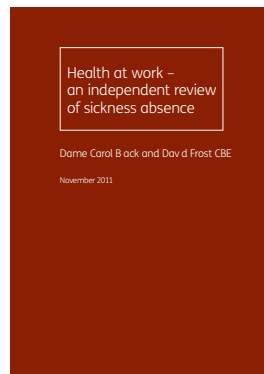
The review also provides a critique of the current system and the roles that healthcare professionals, employers and government services play. This is an important contribution to our

understanding of the sickness absence system and the reviewers offer challenging and new insights into this complex problem as well as a number of recommendations.

The Government has been considering the Review's recommendations and plans to publish a response in November this year. The challenge is to ensure that proposals will be deliverable, will have the impact expected and will dovetail with healthcare delivery systems and policies across Great Britain.

Further information about the Review can be found at

www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/sickness-absence-review



The Work Capability Assessment

The Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is used to determine eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), the main out of work benefit for people with a health condition or disability. The WCA is a functional assessment, focusing on what people can do rather than what they cannot.

Independent reviews

We have a commitment to independently review the WCA. Professor Malcolm Harrington, an eminent occupational physician, has now published two independent reviews and will publish a third before the end of 2012.

Government have accepted and implemented his recommendations, including:

- Building more empathy in to the process, and better supporting claimants through the process;
- Improving the transparency of the face-to-face assessment; and
- Empowering DWP Decision Makers so they can take independent and considered decisions based on all the available evidence.

Further medical evidence

GPs may receive requests from their patients for additional medical evidence about their condition and its impact to support their claim for ESA. This may include:

- A Med 3 or fit note at the start of their claim;
- A DS1500 form if they are terminally ill;
- A factual ESA113 report on your patient; or
- Any other information about their health condition or disability which may help a DWP Decision Maker reach a sound decision on their eligibility.

A healthcare professional from Atos Healthcare, who undertake the assessments on behalf of the department, may also phone you for more information. When making a claim, individuals give consent for DWP to contact their doctor for more information.

The Department is grateful for all the support GPs provide in helping us to ensure that we stand the best chance of reaching the decision which produces the right outcome for each patient.

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Access to Work

Access to Work is a specialist disability service delivered by Jobcentre Plus, which provides practical and financial support to disabled people and those with a long term health condition to help them overcome barriers to starting or keeping a job.

This can include paying towards special aids and equipment; support workers; communication support at interviews; and travel to and in work.

A poster for the Access to Work service. It features a green silhouette of a person jumping over a large green gear, with several other purple and green gears around them. The text is in green and black. The top line says 'Take control of your mental wellbeing...'. Below that, in a green box, it says 'with our Workplace Mental Health Support Service*'. The middle section says 'If you are experiencing depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues that are affecting you at work, then we're here to help. Our free support will enable you to overcome the issues you are experiencing at work, so that you can remain in your job.' At the bottom, it says 'Apply for this service today! Contact us on:' followed by contact details for three regions: The East, South East and London; The Midlands, South West and Wales; and The North and Scotland. There are also logos for 'Reemploy' and 'Jobcentre Plus' and a small 'Fit for 1000' logo at the bottom right.

Take control of your mental wellbeing...

with our Workplace Mental Health Support Service*

If you are experiencing depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues that are affecting you at work, then we're here to help.

Our free support will enable you to overcome the issues you are experiencing at work, so that you can remain in your job.

Apply for this service today! Contact us on:

The East, South East and London
Tel: 020 8426 3110 Telephone: 020 8426 3123
Email: atwork.london@jobcentreplus.gov.uk

The Midlands, South West and Wales
Tel: 02020 423 281 Telephone: 02020 644 886
Email: atwork.cam08@jobcentreplus.gov.uk

The North and Scotland
Tel: 0141 952 5227 Telephone: 0945 952 5050
Email: atwork.glasgow@jobcentreplus.gov.uk

*Eligibility criteria apply. Visit our website for further information: www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth

Reemploy
putting people to work

Jobcentre Plus
Support to Mental Health

Fit for 1000

Mental Health Support Service

Access to Work also provides a support service for people with a mental health condition, who need support returning to the workplace or retaining their current employment.

A range of support is available which is tailored to the individual's needs. This can include:

- assessment of an individual's needs to identify coping strategies;
- a personalised support plan, detailing the steps needed to enter, remain in, or return to work;
- suggestions for reasonable adjustments in the workplace or in working practices; and
- advice and guidance to enable employers to fully understand mental ill health and how they can support employees with a mental health condition.

For more information visit
www.direct.gov.uk/accesstowork

‘What’s on the Horizon?’

Universal Credit is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income.

Universal Credit will help claimants and their families to become more independent and will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment.

The new Universal Credit system aims to:

- improve work incentives;
- smooth the transitions into and out of work, supporting a dynamic labour market;
- simplify the system, making it easier for people to understand, and easier and cheaper for staff to administer;
- reduce in-work poverty; and
- cut back on fraud and error.

Universal Credit Pathfinder will start in April 2013 and Universal Credit will go live across Britain from October 2013.

The transition from the current system of benefits and tax credits will be organised in three phases and is currently expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

Universal Credit will replace a number of current benefits including:

- income based Jobseeker’s Allowance;
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance;

- Income Support;
- Child Tax Credits;
- Working Tax Credits; and
- Housing Benefit.

www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/universal-credit/

Personal Independence

Payment (PIP) is to replace Disability Living Allowance for eligible working age people aged 16 to 64 from 8 April 2013.

PIP is based on an assessment of individual need. The new assessment which has been developed specifically for this purpose will focus on an individual’s ability to carry out a range of key activities necessary to everyday life. Information will be gathered from the individual, as well as healthcare and other professionals who work with and support them. Most people will also be asked to a face to face consultation with a trained independent assessor as part of the claim process.

PIP will be introduced for new claims in some areas of the country from April 2013 and for all new claims in June 2013. We will write to existing claimants between October 2013 and March 2016 to invite them to claim the new benefit

www.dwp.gov.uk/pip

Contact Us

To contact the DWP health and work team, please email:
dwphealthandwork.enq@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Useful web addresses

www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote

For information and links to guidance on the fit note.

www.dwp.gov.uk/healthcare-professional

For guidance and information on health and work and guidance on DWP forms and processes.

www.healthyworkinguk.co.uk

Provides GPs and other primary healthcare professionals timely access to information, training and decision aids to support the management of health and work.

www.yourworkhealth.com

Information and support to help people with chronic fluctuating conditions to remain in or return to work. It also includes information for managers and employers.

www.rcseng.ac.uk/patients/get-well-soon

Information for patients on returning to work after common operations.

www.rcog.org.uk/recovering-well

Patient information leaflets on returning to work after gynaecological surgery for eight common conditions.

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workandmentalhealth

Information and guidance about returning to work after a period of mental ill health, with specific sections for workers, employers, clinicians and carers.

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