

Dr B.Jeph Vite
Dr M Olose
Dr M Le Roux

Dr C McLuckie
Dr S Trigg



Ravenswood
Medical Practice

24 Hening Avenue
Ipswich
IP3 9QJ

Tel: 01473 271122

Our ref: RMP/ALB

The Head Teacher

Dear Sir/Madam

Requests for Medical Certificates for school children during term time

I am writing to you as the Practice has encountered a number of requests for medical certificates for school children during term time.

Non-recurrent short term sickness (less than 7 days)

I have to draw your attention to the fact that GPs do not provide short term sickness certification for periods of less than 7 days and are unable to issue medical certificates for longer periods of sickness absence unless the patient was seen by the GP at the time of the illness. GPs are not contractually required to undertake this and it is not part of their terms of service. In general GPs do not provide certificates for children as the parent's explanation of the absence is generally sufficient for the purposes of the school.

If this information is being requested, GPs are entitled to request a fee under the NHS General Medical Services Statutory Instrument, Schedule 5, Regulation 24 1(a).

1. "The contractor may demand or accept a fee or other remuneration a) from any statutory body for services rendered for the purposes of that body's statutory functions".

These are by and large self limiting illnesses and do not need any treatment at all. Asking for a certificate encourages dependence on the health service and also encourages sick certificate mentality in young children. In addition it means the parent has to take time off work and attend the doctor's surgery. An appointment at the surgery is taken over and could have been used for more serious illnesses.

Please in future do not request certificates from school children or encourage them to miss school for minor self limiting illnesses.

Long term illness

When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist and should not be requested from the GP.

Recurrent short term illnesses

In cases where a child has recurrent short term illnesses this is a matter for very sensitive and expert management by the school in consultation with the parents and the child. The School should seek any additional medical information by directly contacting the GP with the consent of the parent or the child if competent to give legally valid consent.

In cases where there is more prolonged absence the problem needs very careful assessment by the school and School Nursing Service to determine how best to provide education for the child. Again the School may, with appropriate consent, seek any additional medical information directly from the GP. It is most important that the GP retains the full confidence of any child, but it is particularly important for those children that have problems resulting in poor school attendance where a trusted doctor-patient relationship may be critical for the child's ongoing care.

When a child misses an examination

GMS GPs are not contractually obliged to provide a sick note for pupils who are off sick from school. They are also not obliged to provide sickness certification for students that miss an exam or believe their performance was affected due to illness. The same is likely to apply to other NHS GPs. Unfortunately, many GPs still receive requests for the latter.

The BMA's General Practitioners Committee (GPC) therefore wrote to the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) about this, and has received the attached response in Appendix 1, which highlights that medical proof should not be required.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Director of Education at the Council to note. Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Anita Burgess
Practice Manager

Appendix 4 Letter from the General Practitioners Committee (GPC) to Ofqual and their response

BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9JP

E CScott@bma.org.uk

Andrew Hall
Chief Executive
Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
83 Piccadilly
London
W1J 8QA

**General Practitioners
Committee**
Contracts & Performance
subcommittee

9 September 2009

Dear Andrew

Examinations and sickness certification

Every year, the General Practitioners Committee receive a significant number of queries relating to examinations and the provision of sickness certification by GPs. It has become apparent that the majority of these queries are the result of a widespread misunderstanding about the kind of certification that GPs provide. I write to you in the hope that our organisations can work together to negate these misconceptions and help to provide candidates with accurate information in the event that they have to miss an examination through illness.

GPs do not provide sick notes for schoolchildren. When children are absent from school owing to illness, schools may request a letter from a parent or guardian, and this is no different during an exam period. However, children who have missed exams due to illness are frequently told by schools that a note from a doctor is required; but this cannot be provided by a GP. Aside from the fact that parents/guardians are responsible for excusing their children from school, GPs cannot provide retrospective sickness certification. When a child suffers from a long-term condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist.

It is not clear whether the misconceptions are the result of information provided by exam boards or whether they develop within the institutions, but I believe that it would be the benefit of all concerned for these misunderstandings to be corrected via the provision of accurate information to education institutions. In 2002 in its 'Making A Difference – general practitioners report', the Regulatory Impact Unit's public sector team estimated that a potential 47,000 appointments could be saved by correcting misconceptions on the role of GPs in examination sickness certification.

I hope that you will agree that this is an issue that should be addressed and I will be happy to meet with you to discuss further.

Dr John Canning
Chairman of the GPC Contracts & Performance subcommittee

Isabel Nisbet
Acting Chief Executive

25 January 2010

Dr John Canning
Chairman of the GPC Contracts & Performance Subcommittee
General Practitioners Committee
BMA House
Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9JP

Our ref: RS2031



Ofqual

Office of the Qualifications
and Examinations Regulator
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344
Textphone 0300 303 3345
info@ofqual.gov.uk
www.ofqual.gov.uk

Dear Dr Canning,

Thank you for your letter of 9 September 2009, addressed to Andrew Hall, which, following your second letter, sent on 15 December 2009 has been passed to me as Acting Chief Executive of Ofqual, for response.

Awarding Organisations make no requirement for pupils to obtain a medical certificate in support of an application for special consideration. Students are asked for information in support of their application, but this may take the form of a statement by the school. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has confirmed that as far as they are concerned, if a student was absent from an examination as a result of illness and has the support of the school or centre to be absent, special consideration will be granted on that basis. Awarding organisations do not insist that medical proof is provided.

I am sure that you have considered the likelihood that the misconception stems from the conventional necessity for adults to produce a sick note after long periods of absence from work. In order to address this issue with the schools we have contacted the Department for Children Schools and Families and requested that they made local authorities aware (via their weekly email) of this message, which they have now done. We have also informed the Joint Council for Qualifications and have posted a notice on our website. In addition we will pass on this message to the teacher associations and unions.

I hope this response is useful, but I can assure you that the regulations do not ask for medical corroboration in these circumstances and that I do not believe any misconception stems from the awarding organisations.

Yours sincerely,

Isabel N. Nisbet

Isabel Nisbet
Acting Chief Executive

