

NEWSLETTER: APRIL 2010

There has been a big change this month, that some of you will have already noticed. It's the move from sick note to fit note. This newsletter has been written to give you a balanced viewpoint of this new introduction, and what it means for the employer/manager.

Sick Note to Fit Note

From 6th April 2010 G.P.'s will be using a new system to communicate with employers regarding their patient's health.

In place of the traditional 'sick note', there will now be a 'fit note', where the G.P. will be able to comment on whether the patient is capable of performing part or all of their role, with support from their employer.

It is a known fact that those who are off work on long term sick find it more difficult to return to work. Reasons for this might include;

- low self esteem
- lack of confidence
- conflict at work that has not been addressed

However, in general, getting back to work after a period of illness is good for both the employer and the employee. By using the fit note, the G.P. will be able to make a statement regarding how the patient's return to work may be accommodated.

Best practice to help those back to work after a period of illness is still to use return to work plans. With the employee's permission to contact the G.P. employers can communicate proposed plans with the Doctor, who will then have first hand information from the employer, which will undoubtedly help in the ongoing treatment of their patient.

The intention of the fit note is to encourage people to return to work as soon as reasonably practicable, and gives more information than the traditional sick note that focussed on whether a person should remain off work, or not. The G.P. will still be able to indicate on the form whether or not the patient should refrain from work, and for how long, but will now have the flexibility to suggest some work may be beneficial to their recovery.

The main changes include;

- the removal of the fit for work option as a stand alone tick box
- an option for the Doctor to suggest whether the patient is fit for work with some support from their employer
- space for a Doctor to provide information on how their patient's condition may affect their ability to carry out their job role, whether short or long term
- a series of tick boxes for the Doctor to suggest ways the employer might be able to support the patient's return to work

The tick box scenarios to be used by the Doctor may include;

- a phased return to work plan
- altered hours, i.e. 3 days per week or shorter days
- amended duties, i.e. less responsibility or part role
- workplace adaptations, i.e. workstation location or general environment

There is no obligation by the employer to implement any of the tick box scenarios as listed above if it is not practical to do so, but employers must be very careful when deciding a course of action regarding an employee's return to work if they are to avoid claims such as Disability Discrimination. Sufficient attention must be paid to the G.P.'s comments, as well as equal attention to the health, safety, and well being of the employee. The fit note is certainly an attempt to improve the traditional sick note scheme, and make a dent in the amount of incapacity benefit paid each year to people who may well be able to do 'some' work.

It will be interesting to review the effectiveness of the fit note in a couple of years to see whether it has improved workplace attendance, and reduced the overall incapacity bill!

Should you require any support regarding the management of absence, please give us a call on 0115 9728708

And Finally...

**Our website has recently received a face-lift!
To find out how we can help you, please go to
www.hrresponse.co.uk**