

# Rehabilitation services

## Writing to your employee's GP



When an employee is absent, it can be difficult to plan for the future – whether that's tomorrow, next week or beyond. It can also be difficult to plan with confidence how best to support them back to work. Writing to your employee's GP can help.

There may be a number of different situations you'll need to deal with during the early stages of their absence.

These could be:

- Finding out why your employee is absent from work
- Building on what the GP's fit note tells you
- How to accommodate and adjust the working environment for your employees

### More information

By writing to your employee's GP, you will be able to find out more information about your staff member's absence.

While a fit note telling you your employee has been signed off is a good start, it may contain little detail of the reason for their absence. It may also provide some direction, but often gives limited guidance on how to implement any necessary changes. This really emphasises why an employer must specify what information they need when writing to the employee's GP.

### Supporting an employee's return to work

Whatever your situation, you may be considering writing to your employee's GP to establish how you can best manage the situation going forward and support your employee in a Return to Work programme.

This document aims to give you some helpful pointers about suitable content and what the GP likely to find useful.

## You should be aware that under the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, you must:

- ✓ Get written consent from your employee before requesting any medical reports from their GP.
- ✓ Give your employee the option of seeing the report before it is sent to you.
- ✓ Get written consent from your employee to continue to hold their report under the Data Protection Act.

For full information on this important issue, you may find it helpful to visit the following links:

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/ethics/confidentiality-and-health-records/access-to-medical-reports>

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/28/contents>

## INFORMATION THAT THE GP MAY FIND USEFUL

Once you have your employee's written consent to contact their GP, you need to consider what information you are going to include in your letter. It is important that any letter to the GP is relevant to the individual employee concerned (the GP's patient). Here are some hints:

1. In most situations the GP will only have the information provided to them by their patient (your employee).

Providing the GP with a view of matters from your perspective as the employer will broaden the GP's understanding of the situation.

2. When writing to the GP, state your employee's job title and how long they have been with the company.

It may also be useful to include a brief description of the employee's job, possibly provided by their line manager or someone who knows what the employee's role entails. Alternatively, attach a job description if available. Remember, a GP's time is precious and a brief description may be more accessible and useful to the GP.

3. Simply asking the GP how long it will be before your employee can return to work is unlikely to add much to your understanding of the situation.

Asking the GP for their opinion on what currently prevents their patient from returning to work will generally be more useful. In particular, it may help when considering what barriers need to be addressed before a Return to Work plan can be developed.

4. Let the GP know that you support a Return to Work plan and that you recognise this can be an important part of the employee's recovery/rehabilitation.

The GP may be reassured to know that you recognise that a Return to Work plan may need to be on a graduated basis, such as reduced days, reduced hours and/or carrying out only some of their original duties, and you are happy to accommodate this.

Inform the GP that you understand that an individual does not need to be fully recovered from an illness or injury before they begin a Graduated Return to Work and that work can support their recovery. Generally the sooner a Return to Work plan starts, the easier and more successful it will be.

5. Tell the GP about any measures that you have put in place to help your employee.

Make it clear that you would like to understand what you need to do to assist your employee in making a sustainable return to work.

6. The GP will generally find it very useful to have a contact within your company.

This is usually a member of HR or Occupational Health who the GP can liaise with if necessary.

7. By providing the GP with an understanding of the sort of adjustments you are able to make to your employee's hours and duties they will be more able to make achievable suggestions and recommendations for your employee's return.