

Non-NHS work

What is non-NHS work and why is there a fee?

The National Health Service provides most health care to most people free of charge, but there are exceptions: prescription charges have existed since 1951 and there are a number of other services for which fees are charged.

Sometimes the charge is because the service is not covered by the NHS, for example, providing copies of health records or producing medical reports for insurance companies, solicitors, or employers.

The Government's contract with GPs covers medical services to NHS patients but not non-NHS work. It is important to understand that many GPs are not employed by the NHS; they are self-employed, and they have to cover their costs – staff, buildings, heating, lighting, etc. – in the same way as any small business.

In recent years, however, more and more organisations have been involving doctors in a whole range of non-medical work. Sometimes the only reason that GPs are asked is because they are in a position of trust in the community, or because an insurance company or employer wants to ensure that information provided to them is true and accurate.

Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs can charge their own NHS patients are:

- accident/sickness certificates for insurance purposes
- school fee and holiday insurance certificates
- reports for health clubs to certify that patients are fit to exercise
- private prescriptions for travel purposes

Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs can charge other institutions are:

- life assurance and income protection reports for insurance companies
- reports for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in connection with
- disability living allowance and attendance allowance
- medical reports for local authorities in connection with adoption and fostering
- copies of records for solicitors

Do GPs have to do non-NHS work for their patients?

With certain limited exceptions, for example a GP confirming that one of their patients is not fit for jury service, GPs do not have to carry out non-NHS work on behalf of their patients. Whilst GPs will always attempt to assist their patients with the completion of forms, they are not required to do such non-NHS work.

Is it true that the BMA sets fees for non-NHS work?

The British Medical Association (BMA) suggest fees that GPs may charge their patients for non-NHS work (i.e. work not covered under their contract with the NHS) in order to help GPs set their own professional fees. However, the fees suggested by them are intended for guidance only; they are not recommendations, and a doctor is not obliged to charge the rates they suggest.

Why does it sometimes take my GP a long time to complete my form?

Time spent completing forms and preparing reports takes the GP away from the medical care of his or her patients. Most GPs have a very heavy workload, and paperwork takes up an increasing amount of their time. Our GPs do non-NHS work out of NHS time at evenings or weekends so that NHS patient care does suffer.

I only need the doctor's signature – what is the problem?

When a doctor signs a certificate or completes a report, it is a condition of remaining on the Medical Register that they only sign what they know to be true. In order to complete even the simplest of forms, therefore, the doctor might have to check the patient's ENTIRE medical record. Carelessness or an inaccurate report can have serious consequences for the doctor with the General Medical Council (the doctors' regulatory body) or even the Police.

If you are a new patient, we may not have your medical records so the doctor must wait for these before completing the form.

What will I be charged?

It is recommended that GPs tell patients in advance if they will be charged, and what the fee will be. It is up to individual doctors to decide how much they will charge. Please contact reception for our list of Private Fees.

What can I do to help?

- Not all documents need a signature by a doctor, for example passport applications. You can ask another person in a position of trust to sign such documents free of charge. Read the information that comes with these types of forms carefully before requesting your GP to complete them.
- Do not expect your GP to process forms overnight: urgent requests may mean that a doctor has to make special arrangements to process the form quickly, and this may cost more. Usually, non-NHS work will take 2 weeks.

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