

## **Private Fees**

### **Why do GPs sometimes charge fees?**

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 made to cover some of the cost of treatment, for example, dental fees. In other cases, it is because the service is not covered by the NHS, for example, medical reports for insurance companies.

### **Surely the work is paid for by the NHS?**

It is important to understand that GPs are not employed by the NHS, they are employed by the GP practice or self-employed. If self-employed, they must cover their costs – staff, buildings, heating, lighting, etc – in the same way as any small business. The NHS covers these costs for NHS work, but for non-NHS work the fee must cover the doctor's costs.

### **What is covered by the NHS and what is not?**

The government's contract with GPs covers medical services to NHS patients. In recent years, 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 be sure that information provided is accurate.

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

Your doctor receives large amounts of request and which is often to do with whether your general health allows you to do something e.g. to work, receive benefits, drive, play sport, attend school, own a house, a firearm or it is for insurance, court or other medico-legal reasons.

All requests will vary in complexity, volume and consistency ranging from signing a certificate which can take minutes, to an in-depth report with an examination that can take hours.

### **I only need the doctor's signature – what's 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 or even the police.

### **Why does my Practice tell me they can't do my form in this instance?**

Your doctor is inundated with work. They must balance their time with treating the sick, keeping their practice afloat and making sure they are doing all of this safely and within their professional duties as a doctor.

With certain exceptions written within their contract, doctors do not have to carry out non-NHS work. However, many choose to for the benefit of you and other families they treat.

Where a doctor chooses to undertake the work, we advise them to inform and always agree a fee in advance of undertaking work.

Should their volume of work prove to be greater or more complex than expected, the Surgery will contact you to discuss how to proceed.

### **What will I be charged?**

The BMA recommends that GPs tell patients in advance if they will be charged, and how much. It is up to the individual doctor to decide how much to charge, but the BMA produces lists of suggested fees which many doctors use.

Please note that insurance/medical reports will be completed within approximately 6 weeks. We kindly request you do not contact the medical secretaries until 6 weeks has elapsed from the date of request as we are unable to prioritise any one particular report. They are dealt with in strict order of receipt.

### **What can I do to help?**

Not all documents need a signature by a doctor and can be done by other professionals. Please check the form and accompanying guidance as you may get a quicker response that way.

If you have several forms requiring completion, present them all at once and ask your doctor if he or she is prepared to complete them at the same time to speed up the process.

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 will cost more.

Don't book an appointment with your doctor to complete forms without checking with your doctor's administrative staff as to whether you need to or not.