

Why does my GP charge fees?

Information taken from a British Medical Association guide for doctors to share with their patients explaining why they charge fees for certain requests.



Why does my doctor charge fees?

When your doctor is asked to give medical information about you in the form of a report, letter or certificate, the request kick starts a series of processes. This takes time and is not always straightforward or simple to complete. Some of the information is not available easily and will mean the doctor has to sort and select the right information for the request. The doctor also must find out who is funding this work and if it is not part of their NHS work, agree a fee for this.

Surely the work is paid for by the NHS

Many patients see their doctor as the embodiment of the NHS and all that it provides – free care at the point of delivery. However not all work doctors are asked to do is paid for through the National Health Service, and many GPs are self-employed. This means they must cover their time and costs such as staff, buildings, heating, lighting, etc in the same way as any small business. The NHS only pays for NHS work, any work outside of the NHS must be funded by other means and this is why fees are charged.

Why does it take so long?

Your doctor receives large amounts of requests for information, which is often to do with whether or not your general health allows you to do something. For example, to work, receive benefits, drive, play sport, attend school, own a house, possess 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.

What your doctor is signing

When your 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, they may have to check your entire medical record, some of which may not be accessible on a computer or on site. 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.

Why does my doctor seem reluctant or say no to this request?

Your doctor is inundated with work. They have to 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, the British Medical Association advise them to inform you 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 doctor will contact you to discuss how to proceed.

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 usually 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. You may be taking an appointment when you don't need one but someone else does.

For the British Medical Association guide and other information

You can find the guide on the British Medical Association website here www.bma.org.uk/pay-and-contracts/fees, along with other information, for example on certificates that GPs cannot charge fees for.

If you need support, contact us

Telephone 01924 787379 or email enquiries@healthwatchwakefield.co.uk.

If you are Deaf or hearing impaired, you can text us on 07885 913396.

You can also contact us and review service through our website www.healthwatchwakefield.co.uk.

Our office hours are between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

