



Should you obtain a GP or Specialist medical report when an employee is absent from work?

I am often asked to see an employee for a sickness or absence-related issue and have been told by the HR manager or employment lawyer that they have already requested a medical report from the employee's GP or Specialist prior to my consultation. In my opinion, I feel it is sometimes more useful to wait until the employee has had the occupational health assessment, as the occupational health advisor will be able to establish if a GP or Specialist report is really necessary. Also, the occupational health advisor may be able to ask more pertinent questions in the requesting letter after they have assessed the employee and gained a better understanding of the key issues. Another reason is that GPs or Specialists quite often provide more detailed and useful information to another health professionals than to an employer.

In many cases an additional report is unnecessary, can be very expensive or cause significant delays, and may not provide any additional information to help the occupational health professional manage the case or change the advice the occupational health specialist is providing to the employer. For many illnesses, the occupational health professional is likely to understand the natural progression of the condition, treatment options and potential timescales for recovery, so can provide appropriate advice based on their knowledge of the illness and the working environment. There are no set fees for GPs and Specialists, so prices vary considerably, which may be a significant additional cost for the organisation that may not be necessary.

I usually only recommend obtaining a medical report from the treating doctor if absolutely necessary. Types of situations when this is more likely to be recommended are:

- When the employee is not able to give a clear medical history, or is confused about some aspects of their condition or treatment
- When the employee gives an inconsistent medical history, hence there is an unclear picture of the medical situation
- If the health condition is not following the natural progression of the disease, or recovery is significantly prolonged.
- If the case is likely to lead to a dismissal on grounds of capability. This is to ensure that the organisation has all the up-to-date medical information from the treating physician, as well as the occupational health provider, in order to be able to make the important decision on whether it is appropriate to dismiss or not.



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In most cases, waiting until the occupational health assessment has occurred before requesting a report from a GP or specialist would only mean a very short delay in obtaining the report if it is necessary, and may result in a more useful report if it is requested by the occupational health professional.

If you have a current case where you need advice on whether or not to request a GP or specialist report, and the best timing for this, please feel free to call us directly on 07842 245450 or email us at admin@ohsltd.uk and I would be happy to advise you.

