

'FIT FOR WORK' SERVICE



Fit For Work is a Government scheme that provides general work related health advice from an occupational health professional through telephone conversation or delivered via the organisation's website (www.fitforwork.org)

The Fit For Work Service, provided by the UK Government, is free. It is a service that has been designed to assist general practitioners, employees and employers.

The Fit For Work service is designed to support employees and help them return to work in addition to improving their health outcomes.

The Fit For Work service is designed to advise employers to assist employees back in to the workplace.

The Fit For Work service is designed to assist general practitioners providing additional support with completion of the MED3 certificate (fit note)

The Fit For Work service is primarily designed for employers who do not have access to an occupational health service.



Referral requirements

To be eligible for the service, the employee has to be absent from work for four weeks or more. The employee must have a reasonable prospect of returning to work and the employee must consent to the referral being made, either by the general practitioner or the employer.

Fit For Work has two elements:

1. Advice

The Fit For Work service is designed to provide GP's, employees and employers with advice about work related health matters. This might involve providing help identifying adjustments that can be made to assist employees stay in work or return to work.

The advice will be available on line or via a telephone service.

Although the service is primarily targeted at organisations, self-employed patients can also access the service.

2. Referral for an occupational health assessment

The Fit For Work service indicates that it will provide a referral route to access a supportive occupational health assessment for employees who are absent from work for four weeks or more. Patients/employees will be contacted within two working days of a referral by a

Fit For Work occupational health professional. The service indicates that they will receive a holistic, biopsychosocial assessment and that this assessment will usually take place over the telephone. We understand that face to face assessments may be available for a limited number of patients/employees.

The service indicates that the Fit For Work occupational health professional will seek to identify the obstacles preventing the patient/employee from returning to work and agree a plan with the patient/employee that is designed to address each obstacle.



The return to work plan

The Fit For Work occupational health professional will create a return to work plan which will reflect the assessment and provide work focused advice and recommendations which have been discussed with the patient/employee to help them return more quickly.

The return to work plan will be sent via email or post to the patient/employee, the GP and the employer, subject to the patient/employee's consent. Where the GP or the employer has made a referral, the return to work place can be accessed via a web link; subject to the patient/employee's consent.

GP's in Scotland can access return to work plans via the SCI Gateway.

It is hoped that the return to work plan will help GP and management conversations with the employee in respect of their absence and, if appropriate, identify suitable interventions and support that could be offered to the patient/employee by the GP or employer.

The Fit For Work website also provides a live chat forum, an advice hub and a blog and leaflets for the employee and the employer explaining the services, which can be downloaded.

At the present time, the Fit For Work service is only available in a limited area and is currently limited to accepting referrals from general practitioners (does the employer have to accept the advice of fit for work if it contradicts with the advice of our own occupational health service?)



The Fit For Work service is very much a generic service. The details of the occupational health professional providing the service to patients/employees has not yet been fully explained in our opinion. The majority of the interactions, on the basis of the current information available from the Fit For Work website indicate that interactions will be telephone based.

If an organization already has the benefit of an occupational health service that involves occupational health physicians or qualified occupational health nursing advisors in addition to health and safety professionals, such a service will have an in depth knowledge of the working environment, have visited the various workplaces and in addition have an

in depth knowledge of the organisation's risk assessments, the health surveillance programmes and the specific workplace hazards.

Such a service providing a report to an employer or manager would be considered as having a higher level of competence than a generic service provided from a telephone based consultation.



Preventative Healthcare have additional concerns in respect of the ability to fully assess many cases over the telephone and the ability of the current Fit For Work service to follow up patients/employees pro-actively and engage in detail with management in respect of health and safety issues or detailed safety critical issues.

While in our opinion there is definitely some benefit from such a national service, the Fit For Work service is very much in its infancy. The initial initiatives provide general occupational health advice, telephone and on line support. Preventative Healthcare consider this is no substitute for face to face consultation with a competent and qualified occupational health physician or nurse who has an in depth knowledge of a particular working environment.

References:

England and Wales: www.fitforwork.org
0800 032 6235

Welsh Language Line: www.fitforwork.org
0800 032 6233

Scotland: www.fitforworkscotland.scot
0800 019 2211