

Make GP letters for students gratis

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Petition title: Make GP letters for students gratis

Text of petition:

Currently when requiring a letter from the GP to back up an extenuating circumstances claim or for evidence for a DSA application the GP will charge the student around £35 (surgery dependent). This means that on top of the difficulty that a student may be having with their health, learning difficulties, and/or disabilities, they will then have to pay to have a document that shows this. This means that many students (especially those from poorer backgrounds) will have trouble with receiving the support that they need to not only complete their degree, but in some cases survive.



1. Background

The British Medical Association (BMA) website provides a **guide** for doctors to share with their patients explaining why they charge fees for certain requests.

Not all of the work doctors are asked to do is paid for by the NHS and many GPs are self-employed. This means they must cover their time and costs - 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.**

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.

When a doctor is asked to give medical information about a patient in the form of a report, letter or certificate, the ensuing process can be lengthy and is not always straightforward or simple to complete.

In order to complete even the simplest of forms, they may have to check a patient's 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.

Although there are no set fees, the BMA website provides **guidance** for medical practitioners about common fees, including **what and when to charge**.

2. Welsh Government action

The Minister for Health and Social Services stated in correspondence to the Committee on 16 March 2020 that **A Healthier Wales** sets out the Welsh Government's plan for health services based on the principles of prudent healthcare, with the right person providing the right care at the right time. In many cases a GP will not be the best placed person to provide support to a student - welfare support officers or counsellors may be better able to support students when making cases for extenuating circumstances.

The Minister goes on to say that GPs provide NHS services free of charge to patients within the parameters of the **general medical services contract**. However, as independent contractors they may elect, in some circumstances, to charge for

the completion of forms or reports for third parties that are not in connection with the provision of NHS health care.

In relation to the fees suggested by the BMA (as mentioned above), the Minister highlights that these are intended for guidance only and are not recommendations and a doctor is not obliged to charge the rates the BMA suggests. This is in order to comply with legislation preventing anti-competitive practice. This means that the decision and amount to charge for such services will vary from practice to practice and sometimes will not be imposed at all.

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