

Doctors won't decide on fitness to work

The new fit note will not give doctors the option to deem a patient "fit for work", only whether they may be fit for some work, the government has indicated. The final decision will instead be a matter for the employee and the employer. Under the new system, due to come into force on 6 April, GPs will replace the sick note with a computer-generated medical fit note explaining what a patient is able to do. However, a report in Personnel Today magazine says the government's response to the Reforming Medical Statement consultation, published on 29 January, rules out allowing GPs to determine whether a worker is 100 per cent fit to return to work. Employers will only receive doctors' notes presenting one of two options – either that the employee is "unfit for work", or "may be fit for some work". The response paper says the approach will "empower individuals", adding: "While we understand that some stakeholders believe that there may be some practical benefits from retaining 'fit for work' statements, especially for those involved in safety-critical roles, doctors completing the medical statements do not have the knowledge or expertise about an individual's job role and the risks involved. The doctor will have to indicate on the new revised statement whether or not they need to assess their patient's fitness for work again, making the need for a 'fit for work' option unnecessary." TUC general secretary Brendan Barber commented: "The new notes will only help ill or injured workers get back to their jobs more quickly if GPs are better trained in how to recognise occupational diseases and if they know what a patient's work entails. Employers also need to know how to use the information on the notes and that means that we need much better access to occupational health advice for employers." He added: "Simply handing a list of tasks an individual can do to their employer won't help that worker get better or get back to their full fitness. No-one should be forced back to work before they are able, especially as their work may have been what made them ill in the first place."

- Reforming the Medical Statement: Government response to the consultation on draft regulations: The Social Security (Medical Evidence) and the Statutory Sick Pay (Medical Evidence) (Amendment) Regulations 2010, DWP, January 2010 [[pdf](#)]. [Personnel Today](#).