

Non NHS Fees - Your Questions answered

Why is there a charge? Isn't the NHS supposed to be free?

The National Health Service provides most health care to most people free of charge but there are exceptions: Prescription charges have existed since 1951 and there are a number of other services for which fees are charged. Sometimes the fee is charged to cover the cost of treatment for example, dental fees but in other cases it is because the service is not covered by the NHS, for example: medical reports for insurance companies, private letters for patients and copies of medical records requests.

Surely the Doctor is being paid anyway?

It is important to understand that GPs are paid to carry out NHS work which takes priority. Charges for non NHS work are made to cover costs.

What is covered by the NHS and what is not?

In recent years more and more organisations have been involving Doctors in a whole range of non-medical work. Sometimes the only reason a GP is asked is because they are in a position of trust within the community or because an employer or insurance company wants to be sure that information provided to them is true and accurate.

Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs can charge their NHS patients are:

- Accident/sickness insurance certificates
- Private sick notes (eg for the first 7 days of an illness where the patient can self-certify for free)
- Certain travel vaccinations
- Private medical insurance reports
- Private letters such as housing letters
- HGV/taxi medicals

Examples of non-NHS services which GPs can charge other organisations for are:

- Medical reports for insurance companies
- Medical records requested by a Solicitor
- Some reports for Department of Social Security/Benefits Agency/Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Do GPs have to do non-NHS work for their patients?

With certain limited exceptions, for example a GP confirming that one of their patients is not fit for jury service, GPs do not have to carry out non-NHS work on behalf of their patients. Whilst GPs will always attempt to assist their patients with the completion of forms, they are not required to do such non-NHS work. Please note that we do not sign passports at our Practice.

Why does it sometimes take my GP a long time to complete my form?

Time spent completing forms and preparing reports and letters takes the GP away from the NHS medical care of his/her patients. Our GPs have a very heavy workload and private requests for non-NHS work take up an increasing amount of time. We currently have a patient list size of over 10,000 patients and we receive a large number of requests each day for non-NHS work for our patients.

I only need the Doctor's signature – what is the problem?

When a GP 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, therefore, the GP may have to check the patient's entire medical record. Carelessness or an inaccurate report can have serious consequences for the GP with the General Medical Council or even the Police.

What Fee will I be charged?

The BMA (British Medical Association) recommends that GPs tell patients in advance if they will be charged and how much. It is up to individual GPs and Practices to decide how much a patient can be charged.

Where any blood tests/immunisations are required, for example, drugs screening/HIV testing for certain medicals such as for an employment medical, etc. an additional charge will be made for these. Patients will receive a separate bill from the Pathology Department at the Hospital.

A list of our current fees is available on request from reception.

What can patients do to help?

- Do not expect your GP to process your request either on the day or overnight. We appreciate that your request is extremely important to you and we will aim to process it as soon as practicably possible.
- Please be patient – our Reception & Administration staff cannot speed up a patient request by being put under pressure. As soon as your request is ready a member of our administration or reception team will contact you.
- If you think you have been waiting too long, you are welcome to phone and check that we have your request but please do not call every day.

Can I view my medical records or have copies of them?

Yes you are entitled to view your medical records or have copies of them. This is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and is called an 'Access Request'. This act gives rights for living individuals to access their own records. The right can also be exercised by an authorised representative on the individual's behalf. Your health records are recorded in a combination of computerised and manual forms and may include computerised or hand written clinical notes, letters to and from other health professional, copies of x-rays, laboratory reports, etc.

The maximum costs we can charge for providing copies of patient health records are detailed below:

- Health records held electronically £10.00
- Health records held in part electronically and part on other media such as paper, x-ray, film etc. will be charged up to a maximum of £50.00 (this fee includes a £10 access fee and 40p per copy for every copy produced of your medical records and will be capped at £50.00 The maximum cost to 'view only' your medical record is £10.00

An appointment will need to be made to view your medical records.

A request in writing will need to be made to request to either view or have copies of your medical requests and should be dated and signed. We aim to provide a report or copies of records within the following timescales.

Medical report completed by the GP – 28 days

Copies of records – 40 days

Situations where health information may be limited or denied

The Data Protection Act enables the data controller (the registered GP) to limit or deny access to an individual's health record where:

- The information released may cause serious harm to the physical or mental health or condition of the patient or any other person;
- Access would disclose information relating to or provided by a third party who has not consented to that disclosure unless:
 - The third party is a health professional who has compiled or contributed to the health records or who has been involved in the care of the patient.
 - The third party is not a health professional, but gives their consent to disclose that information
 - It is reasonable to disclose without that third party's consent.

We hope that this information helps our patients to understand the reasons why we charge a fee for non-NHS work and the timescales involved.