

Where next for fit notes?

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The signing of fit notes has always been a controversial part of the GP role and the demand is increasing. Pulse magazine reported on 5th August that the number of fit notes increased by almost 9% in the past two years. GPs in England wrote almost 9.5 million fit notes in 2018/19, compared to over 8.7 million in 2016/17.

This upward trajectory coincides with the DWP/DHSC Joint Unit's Improving Lives initiative that outlines a number of options for reform of sickness certification. In this introduction to SOM eNews piece, I can provide an update on the progress of a Joint Unit Challenge Fund project around the use of the Allied Health Professionals (AHP) Health and Work Report.

Working through [RHHMedical](#), I have been privileged to be the GP Lead for Leicester half of 'The Link' Project, that aims to integrate (AHPs) into GP practice teams to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR). The grant holder for the project is [Social Finance](#), who has commissioned [RTW Plus](#) to place an Occupational Therapist and a Consultant Physiotherapist, both with VR expertise into the practice teams of 6 GP surgeries (population 47,398) to support patients back to work via emotional support and engagement with their employers. This is the first UK project to integrate and issue the AHP note from a primary care system (System one) for patients requiring sickness certification instead of a GP fit note. By October 2019, 246 referrals were made in 7 months across Leicester and Newcastle and 122 AHP notes issued. Only 2 employers have requested a GP fit note instead! The formal report and evaluation are planned for March 2020, but the early signs around the acceptability of other healthcare professionals signing fit notes in primary care are encouraging.

(This article is an update with information taken from the Improving Lives Command Paper and presentations given before the general election announcement. The DWP/DHSC Joint Unit for Work and Health and Public Health England were not involved with this article.)