

**Protocol for: Declining Private Letter Requests**

**Written by: The Management Team**

**Review: Alternative years**

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**Purpose**

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The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out a clear, consistent approach for handling requests for private letters and reports that fall outside the NHS General Medical Services (GMS) / Personal Medical Services (PMS) contract.
- Protect GP and staff time so that core NHS services can be prioritised.
- Provide clear information to patients and external organisations about what the practice will and will not provide

**Scope**

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This policy applies to:

- All GPs, salaried doctors, locums, nurses, allied health professionals and administrative staff working at Seaside Medical Centre.
- All registered patients and any third parties (e.g. solicitors, employers, insurers, schools, housing providers, council, armed forces, gyms, private healthcare providers) requesting letters or reports.

**Policy Statement**

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Seaside Medical Centre has taken the decision to decline all requests for private letters that are not part of our NHS contractual obligations.

This includes, but is not limited to, letters or forms requested for:

- Housing or homelessness applications
- Gym / exercise / slimming club / sports participation
- Fitness to work / return to work (where a Med 3 is not indicated)
- University / school / exam boards / mitigating circumstances
- Benefit appeals or supporting letters (unless specifically commissioned)
- Character references or non-medical statements of support
- Confirmation that a patient “is under the care of” or “has been seen by” the GP
- Any other non-contractual, non-commissioned private letter or report

Where a service is not commissioned by the ICB or NHS England, and is not required under the core GMS/PMS contract, the practice will not undertake it, whether or not a fee is offered.

### **Rationale**

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The GMS/PMS contract requires practices to provide essential services: identification and management of illness, provision of health advice, and referral to other services during core hours.

- Non-contractual private letters represent additional, unfunded workload and divert clinical and administrative time away from core NHS care.
- General practice is under significant workload and workforce pressure, and it is necessary to limit non-essential work to maintain safe, high-quality care for all patients.

This approach is consistent with BMA safe working guidance and national advice on managing inappropriate workload transfer to general practice.

### **What the practice will provide instead**

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Although we will not provide private letters, we will:

#### 1. Maintain accurate medical records

- Clinicians will continue to document consultations and clinical decisions in the patient record as usual.

#### 2. Provide access to records

- Patients may access their records via the NHS App or online services.
- Patients may make a Subject Access Request (SAR) for copies of their medical records, which will be provided in line with data protection legislation.
- Third parties (e.g. solicitors, insurers) may request medical information with the patient's explicit consent, and this will be processed under the appropriate legal framework (e.g. SAR, formal medical report arrangements) where this is reasonable and resourced.

#### 3. Provide statutory fit notes (Med 3)

- Where clinically appropriate and in line with national guidance, GPs will issue Med 3 fit notes for sickness absence of more than 7 calendar days.
- For absences of 7 days or fewer, patients are expected to self-certify, and the practice will not provide private sick notes or letters.

This policy will be:

- Published on the practice website.
- Displayed in the waiting room (summary version).

### Review

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This policy will be reviewed every 2 years, or sooner if:

- There are changes to the GMS/PMS contract.
- New services are commissioned by the ICB that affect private work.
- National guidance (e.g. from NHS England or BMA) changes.

### Patient-facing leaflet / website text

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#### **Title: Why We Do Not Provide Private Letters**

#### **Our priority is your NHS care**

Our main job as a GP practice is to provide NHS medical care to our patients. General practice is under a lot of pressure, and we must use our time and resources carefully so we can look after those who are unwell.

For this reason, our practice has decided **not to provide private letters or reports** that are outside our NHS contract.

#### **What we mean by “private letters”**

We will **not** provide letters or forms for things like:

- Housing or council applications
- School, college, university or exam boards (e.g. mitigating circumstances)
- Gym, sports club or slimming club
- “Fit to work” or “fit to study” letters (where a Med 3 fit note is not required)
- Benefit appeals or supporting letters
- Character references or general “support” letters
- Letters simply confirming that you are “under the care of” or “have been seen by” the GP

This list is not exhaustive – if a letter is not part of our NHS contract, we will not provide it, even if you offer to pay.

### Why we have this policy

- Our NHS contract requires us to provide **essential medical services**, such as diagnosing and treating illness and referring you when needed.
- Private letters are **extra, non-NHS work** and are not funded.
- Doing this extra work takes time away from appointments and care for patients who are unwell.

To keep our service safe and fair for everyone, we must focus on core NHS work.

### What we can offer instead

Although we do not write private letters, we can help in other ways:

#### Access to your medical records

- You can view parts of your record via the **NHS App** or online services.
- You can request copies of your records through a **Subject Access Request (SAR)**. This is usually free of charge.
- You can then share this information yourself with whoever is asking for evidence (e.g. council, school, employer).

#### Fit notes (sick notes) for work

- If you are off work for **more than 7 calendar days** and it is medically appropriate, we can provide a **Med 3 fit note**.
- For **7 days or fewer**, you should use your employer's **self-certification** process. We do not provide private sick notes for short-term illness.

#### Formal medical reports (in some cases)

- In certain situations, organisations such as insurers or solicitors may request a formal medical report with your consent.
- These are handled under specific rules and may involve a fee to the requesting organisation. They are different from simple "support letters".

#### What you can do if someone asks you for a GP letter

- If a school, employer, council, or other organisation asks you to get a letter from your GP:
- Show them this policy.
- Explain that the practice does not provide private letters.
- Ask them what **alternative evidence** they will accept (for example, self-certification, their own forms, or copies of your medical records).

Many organisations have their own processes and should not insist on a GP letter.

#### Thank you for your understanding

We know this may be frustrating, but this policy helps us protect GP and staff time so that we can focus on providing safe, timely NHS care to all our patients.