

Evaluation of the Statement of Fitness for Work (fit note): quantitative survey of fit notes

Rationale for data collection

The system of sickness certification in the UK was changed in 2010, with the 'fit note' replacing the 'sick note'. The new medical statement provided an opportunity for all interested parties (GP, patient, employer) to agree on the type and amount of work a patient/employee might be able to do (with the appropriate level of support).

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned a national evaluation of the fit note. The evaluation was conducted by research staff at Division of Health Services Research, University of Liverpool, and at the Institute for Employment Studies, Brighton.

Where and how data was collected

- 49 general practices were recruited to participate in the evaluation. 10 in Wales, 7 in Scotland, 12 in Derbyshire, 9 in North West and 11 in South East England (excluding London)
- Because fit note data is not usually routinely collected at general practices, the evaluation used 'carbonised' pads of fit notes at each of the 49 participating practices. These pads enabled details of an issued fit note to be retained on a separate sheet.
- Details of each fit note were anonymised and entered into a data collection template by a member of the practice admin staff. Data files from each practice were uploaded monthly to a secure central project web site.
- Practices were requested to collect and record data for a period of 12 months

Data sets

There are three related sets of data (available in SPSS or STATA format).

1. The main fit note data set includes details of 58,595 fit notes issued to over 25,000 patients in the collection period. The fields are:

- Practice code
- date of issue of fit note
- diagnostic category (i.e. reason for work incapacity)
- GP advice about fitness to work (No/ May be fit)

If 'may be fit', type of support required.....

- a phased return to work is appropriate (N/Y)
- work duties should be amended (N/Y)
- working hours should be altered (N/Y)
- workplace adaptations should be made (N/Y)
- free text comment box (to elaborate on above, or to recommend other support)
- Need to re-assess patient at end of current note (N/Y)
- Certifying GP code
- Study number of patient receiving note (for tracking purposes)
- Patient gender
- Age at time of receiving note
- Living in one of 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in respective country (England, Scotland or Wales) (N/Y)
- Living in one of 20% least deprived neighbourhoods in respective country (England, Scotland or Wales) (N/Y)

2. A data set providing some information about the 49 data collection practices.

- Practice code
- Date of commencement of data collection
- Date of completion
- Location of practice (urban etc)
- Size of practice
- Deprivation status of practice

3. A data set providing limited information about a majority of GPs issuing fit notes.

- GP code
- Practice code
- Gender of GP
- Age group of GP
- Works full/part time
- Partner/salaried/other

Supporting documentation

While there is no formal user manual, we have a short methodology document with more detailed information relating to:-

- the practices contributing data to the evaluation
- how the data was collected
- the data items collected for the evaluation
- how diagnoses were allocated to categories
- other variable transformations