

What you need to know about sick notes

The validity of sick notes has come under the spotlight this week, but it is not a new issue, rather one which employers have been grappling with for a long time. The Health Professions Council South Africa has guidelines for what a sick note should include. Section 23 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act also includes the requirements. As a legal document, the sick note must also be an original and must be legible.

By [Myrna Sachs](#) 6 Feb 2020



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The Ethical and Professional Rules of the Medical and Dental Professions Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa provides notes: Rule 15.(1) A practitioner shall only grant a certificate of illness if such certificate contains the following information, namely:

- the name, address and qualification of the practitioner;
- the name of the patient;
- the employment number of the patient (if applicable);
- the date and time of the examination;
- whether the certificate is being issued as a result of personal observations by the practitioner during an examination, or as the result of information received from the patient and which is based on acceptable medical grounds;
- a description of the illness, with the informed consent of the patient, provided that if the patient is not prepared to give such consent, the medical practitioner or dentist shall merely specify that, in his or her opinion based on an examination of the patient, the patient is unfit to work or has a medical condition.
- whether the patient is totally indisposed for duty or whether the patient is able to perform less strenuous duties in the work situation;
- the exact period of recommended sick leave;
- the date of issuing of the certificate of illness; and
- a clear indication of the identity of the practitioner who issued the certificate which shall be personally and originally signed by him or her next to his or her initials and surname in printed or block letters.

If the certificate is pre-printed, then the practitioner must delete the words that are not relevant. If the patient

went to the doctor after two days, and the doctor did not examine them during the initial period, the sick note would normally read, "as I was informed that the patient etc."

An examination and sick note issued by a nurse or other person who is not qualified to carry out examination and diagnosis is not accepted. Any certificate bearing an illegible signature and a rubber stamp is unacceptable and in such cases can be questioned and treated as unpaid leave.

It must be remembered though, that where an employee only takes one day or two days' sick leave, they are not required to produce a medical certificate, those days remain classified as sick leave days and cannot be taken as unpaid leave.

An employer has a right to question a sick note that does not follow the above guidelines or which has been altered. Some companies have employed independent consulting companies or health risk managers to assist in the management of absenteeism in the workplace. An effective absenteeism management programme aims to reduce the adverse implications of absenteeism, such as increased costs, staff morale, and employees having to take on extra work as well as monitoring sick notes received from doctors.

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