

Non-NHS Work

Sixways Clinic private (Non NHS) Charges

Why do GPs charge fees? Your questions answered.

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 still exist in England and there is a number of other services for which fees are charged. Sometimes the charge is made to cover some of the cost of treatment, e.g. dental fees. In other cases it is because the service is not covered by the NHS, e.g. medical reports for insurance companies, claim forms for referral for private care, letters and forms which require the doctor to review the patient's medical records, etc.

Surely the doctor is being paid anyway?

It is important to understand that GPs are not employed by the NHS. They are self-employed, and they have to cover their costs - staff, buildings, heating, lighting etc - in the same way as any small business. The NHS pays the doctor for specific NHS work, but for non-NHS work the fee has to cover the doctor's costs.

What is covered by the NHS and what is not?

The government's contract with GPs covers medical services to NHS patients. In recent years, more and more organisations have been involving doctors in a whole range of non-medical work.

Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs at Sixways Clinic charge their NHS patients are:

- Certain travel vaccinations
- Private medical insurance reports
- Holiday cancellation claim forms
- Referral for private care forms

Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs at Sixways Clinic charge other institutions are:

- Medical reports for an insurance company
- Some reports for the DWP/Benefits Agency
- Examinations of local authority employees

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

Time spent completing forms and preparing reports takes the GP away from the medical care of his/her patients. GPs have a very heavy workload and paperwork takes up an increasing amount of their time.

I only need the doctor's signature!

When doctors sign a certificate or complete a report, it is a condition of remaining on the Medical Register that they only sign what they know to be true. Therefore, in order to complete even the simplest of forms, the doctor needs to check the patient's medical record. Carelessness or an inaccurate report can have serious consequences for the doctor, with the General Medical Council or even the Police. The charge reflects either the time required to check information and/or the degree of responsibility in signing the document. If a form is required urgently (e.g. within 48 hours) then this will increase the charge.

What will I be charged?

The BMA recommends that GPs tell patients in advance if they will be charged, and how much. It is up to the individual practice to decide how much to charge, but the BMA produces lists of suggested fees for the doctors to use as a guideline.

Charges at Sixways Clinic

In the past we have completed reports and forms before payment has been made, but have sadly found there to be many occasions when the doctor has given up the time to do the work, but the fee has not been forthcoming. Therefore the fee must be paid in advance at the time the request for the letter or form to be completed is made or when the appointment for a medical is booked.

WE CANNOT MAKE EXCEPTIONS.

What can be done to avoid charges?

Not all documents need to be signed by a doctor. For example, you could ask another person in a position of trust, who may be willing to sign a passport application free of charge. Possibly a teacher, an accountant, etc. including those who are retired.

Do not expect your GP to process forms overnight. Urgent requests may mean that a doctor has to make special arrangements to process the form quickly and this will cost more.