

GLoucestershire LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE



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MEDICAL ADVICE TO HEALTH CLUBS – A NOTE FROM GLOUCESTERSHIRE LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEE

Introduction. Health clubs have expanded rapidly in recent years. Increasingly they are offering 'personalised programmes' of exercise to their clients. Gloucestershire GPs have come under increasing pressure to fill in forms to certify to the Health Club that the potential client is fit for an exercise programme, or to indicate the limitations required of such a programme. It is important to understand that GPs are not the doctors who should be advising Health Clubs in this way.

Why a GP is inappropriate.

1. Any contract made between a health club and a client is a matter for them, and should not involve NHS services.
2. GPs filling in forms like this take on a legal 'duty of care'. This means that they could be held liable if anything went wrong. Such a duty of care could not be accepted unless the GP had a proper knowledge of the nature of the exercise proposed.
3. GPs are rarely sports medicine specialists.
4. GPs have a contract with the NHS to provide medical services to patients on their list. Their responsibilities under this contract do not include advising third parties who provide other services to those patients. Moreover, with very few exceptions, GPs are not allowed to charge their registered NHS patients for medical services.

What to do if you run a Health Club.

1. If you need details of a client's medical condition you should accept what the client states about their condition. If they have a condition about which you need to know more you should choose your own source of medical advice.
2. If you send a form to a GP please make sure that your client has signed a consent form authorising the doctor to give information.
3. A copy of the consent should be sent with your request, together with your undertaking to pay a reasonable fee for the doctor's time. Please do not expect a GP to give you professional advice unless you are willing to pay for it. Even though you may have offered to pay, the GP may feel unable to sign it off, for the reasons stated above.

What to do if you are a patient/client.

1. If you are fit and not on any medication it should not be necessary for a reputable health club to require medical back-up for your statements.
2. If you have a medical condition that has led you to seek medical attention you should inform the Health Club, and let them know what medication you are taking.
3. Your doctor can give general advice on exercise but cannot advise on specific exercise programmes offered by Health Clubs. Your doctor will not charge you for this advice.
4. Your health club should not give you a form to take to your doctor for completion.

[Signed on the original]

Mike Forster
LMC Lay Secretary