

SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

College of Medicine Building, 16 College Road, Singapore 0316

Telephone No: 2237777 Telex No: RS 34360 MOH HQ Fax: 2241677

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Your Ref:

3 Mar 94

All Registered Medical Practitioners

ISSUE OF MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

The Singapore Medical Council has received complaints that some medical practitioners are issuing medical certificates to patients whom they know are not sick. During a recent inquiry, four practitioners were suspended and two practitioners were censured by the Council for issuing medical certificates without proper medical grounds. A number of doctors were also issued with letters of advice. All these doctors were investigated by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau who subsequently lodged complaints with the Medical Council.

2 The issue of a medical certificate by a practitioner carries with it the responsibility to ensure that the patient deserves it on proper medical grounds. The Medical Council considers the abuse of such professional privilege given to medical practitioners a serious professional misconduct.

3 A medical practitioner must ensure that a proper physical examination of the patient is carried out and that there are sufficient medical grounds and evidence to justify the issuing of a medical certificate. Any practitioner who issues in his professional capacity any certificate which he knows to be untrue, misleading or improper brings himself within the scope of the Council's disciplinary action.

Certificates for Absence from Court Attendance

4 The Council would also like to advise all medical practitioners to comply with the following guidelines whenever medical certificates are requested by members of the public and/or their solicitors to support their request to the Courts for their cases/trials to be postponed.

5 Before a medical certificate is issued, a medical practitioner should always ascertain the purpose for the medical certificate. If it is in relation to attendance in Court, medical practitioners should always exercise their professional judgement cautiously before making a decision to issue a medical certificate.

6 The certificate which is issued after the medical examination should also specify in simple and lay language, the nature of the illness, the expected period of illness and whether the illness renders the person unfit to attend Court.

7 A sample copy of the medical certificate used in the Government hospitals and polyclinics is enclosed for your reference.

8 The issue of such certificates in the above manner would go a long way towards assisting the Courts in deciding whether or not to grant any application for a postponement of the case or trial.

Date and Signature on Certificates

9 There are also a few other irregularities which the Council noticed on the date of issue and the signature on the medical certificates. I am highlighting these here so that all practitioners would know what should be the correct practice.


10 A medical certificate must bear the date upon which it was written and where this differs from the date of consultation this must clearly be disclosed. Under no circumstances should practitioners back-date or post-date medical certificates. Dating a certificate to give the impression that the patient was seen earlier or later is a case of false certification and the natural inference is that it is given to mislead.

11 The certificate should also contain a statement of the practitioner's opinion as to the period of medical leave necessitated by the patient's condition. Sometimes, a patient may indicate that he was absent from work the previous day because of his illness or injury, then it may be in order for the practitioner to issue a certificate to cover the previous day if the symptoms are consistent with the patient's claim and there is ample justification for doing so. However, the practitioner must bear in mind that his judgement may be challenged by the employer and other affected parties, e.g. the Courts.

12 The Council has received information that some practitioners allow their clinic staff or a locum doctor to sign the medical certificates using their names. A practitioner's name and signature are required on the medical certificate so that the maker of the certificate is clearly identified and the truth of any statement which a registered practitioner may certify can be accepted. The examining practitioner should therefore always sign the certificate himself. Even in his absence, he should never allow the clinic staff or anyone else to sign the certificate under his name.

13 The question of issuing medical certificates to "malingering" patients does not arise here. This is based on the practitioner's clinical assessment and judgement after appropriate examination of the patient.

14 I hope that this circular has clarified the doubts that some practitioners may have on the issuing of medical certificates and trust that you will comply with these guidelines.


DR KWA SOON BEE
REGISTRAR
SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

Specimen Government Medical Certificate

(R01/D2/Circular.MC1)

ORIGINAL		MEDICAL CERTIFICATE		Serial No.
Name			NRC No.	
*This is to certify that the abovenamed is unfit for duty for a period of _____				
_____ days from _____ to _____ inclusive				
Type of medical leave granted —				
<input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalisation Leave			<input type="checkbox"/> Outpatient Sick Leave	
Admitted on _____			<input type="checkbox"/> Maternity Leave	Delivered on _____
Discharged on _____			<input type="checkbox"/> Sterilisation Leave	Operated on _____
This Certificate is invalid valid for absence from court attendance				
Diagnosis			Surgical Operation (if applicable)	
*Fit for normal/light duty from _____ to _____				
*The abovenamed patient attended my clinic at _____ am/pm and left at _____ am/pm. No medical leave is necessary.				
Hospital/Clinic		Ward No.	Signature, Name (in BLOCK LETTERS) and Designation	
		Date		
NO 355		*Write as necessary		