**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 have existed since 1951, and there are a number of other services for which fees are charged. It is because these services are not covered by the NHS, for example, medical reports for insurance companies, claim forms for referral for private care and other letters and forms which require the doctor to review the patient's medical records.

**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 our 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 can charge their NHS patients are:**

Letters requested by, or on behalf of, the patient  
Accident/ sickness insurance certificates and reports  
Certain travel vaccinations  
Private medical insurance reports  
Holiday cancellation claim forms  
Referral for private care forms

Certificates for fitness to start a diet regime or join a gym

Medicals for HGV/ taxi/ PSV/ elderly drivers

Diving licence forms

Private sick notes

**Examples of non-NHS services for which GPs can charge other institutions are:**  
Medical reports for an insurance company  
Some reports for the DSS/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 heavy workload and paperwork takes up an increasing amount of their time. Meeting the needs of patients' medical problems obviously takes priority.

**I only need the doctor's signature-what is the problem?**

When a doctor signs a certificate or completes 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 entire medical record. Carelessness or an inaccurate report can have serious consequences

**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.