



MEDICAL BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY	
TITLE: MEDICAL CERTIFICATE– POLICY	
EFFECTIVE DATE: 17 FEBRUARY 2005	REVIEWED: 23 JANUARY 2006, March 2009

Introduction:

In the course of professional responsibilities medical practitioners are commonly asked to issue certificates certifying sickness or a medical condition (medical also be required by insurers, and in court proceedings. Recipients of certificate must presume that any statement, which a doctor may certify, can be accepted without question.

Medical practitioners, employers and the general public from time to time seek guidance from the Medical Board of the Northern Territory in relation to issuing and completing of medical certificates.

Guideline

Doctors are advised to consider the following points when a patient requests a medical certificate.

1. The certificate should be legible, written on the doctor's letterhead and should not contain abbreviations or medical jargon.
2. The certificate should be based on facts known to the doctor. The certificate may include information provided by the patient but any medical statements must be based upon the doctor's own observations or must indicate the factual basis of those statements.
3. The certificate should:
 - a) Indicate the date on which the examination took place;
 - b) Indicate the degrees of incapacity of the patient;
 - c) Indicated the date on which the doctor considers the patient is likely to be able to return to work; and
 - d) Be addressed to the party requiring the certificate as evidence of illness, eg. Employer, insurer, magistrate.
4. Under no circumstances should the examination date:
 - a) Be backdated or dated forward to correspond with an existing or proposed absence from work;

- b) Be other than the date on which the patient attended the doctor and at which consultation a genuine medical condition was observed or was considered, in the doctor's' judgement, to have been suffered in the recent past; or
 - c) Cater for off work for holidays or special needs.
5. A certificate may be issued by a doctor subsequent to a patient taking sick leave. However, the certificate must:
- a) State the date of the examination;
 - b) Clearly indicate the whether it is based upon observations of symptoms during the examination or upon information provided by the patient which the doctor deems to be true; and
 - c) Cover the period during which the doctor believes the illness would have incapacitated the patient.
6. When issuing a medical certificate, doctors should consider whether or not an injured or partially incapacitated patient could return to work with altered duties. The general nature of those duties, which should not be attempted, should be noted on the certificate. Arrangements regarding altered duties are matters for negotiation between the patient and the employer.
7. Patient rights to confidentiality must be respected; a diagnosis should not be included in a certificate without patient's consent.
8. Patients may request doctors to withhold information regarding their diagnosis; In such cases it should be made clear to the patient that the information provided on the certificate may not (be sufficient) to attract sick leave and that an employer has the ultimate right to accept or to reject a certificate.
9. Signing a false certificate may result in the doctor facing a charge of negligence or fraud. Further more, the issuing of deliberately false, incorrect or misleading certificate may lead to a complaint of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct under the *Health Practitioners Act*.

The Board also notes that the Australian Medical Association has issued a statement on this matter, which may be of assistance.