

Press release

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Tea-breaker poll: sickness self-certification

The majority of occupational health (OH) professionals say the current seven-day sickness absence self-certification period should not be extended to 14 days, despite [calls to do so by doctors' union the British Medical Association \(BMA\)](#)¹.

The 'Tea-breaker' online poll, run by The At Work Partnership in October 2016, found that the overwhelming majority (86%) of OH practitioners think that self-certification should remain at seven days. Only 7% agreed that it should be extended to 14 days; and just 2% thought it should be extended further. Full results are published in the latest edition [Occupational Health \[at Work\]](#).

The findings are in line with the official responses from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine and the Society of Occupational Medicine who [do not support the proposal](#) to extend employee sickness self-certification to 14 days. Both bodies say it is in the patient's best interest to start the return-to-work dialogue with GPs and employers sooner rather than later.

One respondent acknowledged the BMA's aim to support GPs by reducing patient visits for fit notes but said: 'I believe [the proposed extension] will result in individuals being off sick for longer, which will not be good for the employee or the employer who will not have medical advice on how to manage and support their member of staff. The whole purpose of the fit note was to get people back into work as quickly as possible. Extending the length of time for self-certification goes completely against this and would not be supported by many, if any, employers, particularly in the public sector.'

Another commented: 'I perceive that this [proposed extension] would be abused by some employees who may see it as an easy way to take an extra holiday.'

Those supporting extending the self-certification period pointed to the difficulty for some patients of being able to make a GP appointment within seven days, and noted that 14 days might be more practicable for both GPs and employees.

1. British Medical Association, Annual Representative Meeting, 19–23 June, Belfast

Further information: The At Work Partnership, editorial@atworkpartnership.co.uk

Notes for editors:

1. The article and poll results are published in the December 2016/January 2017 edition of the journal [Occupational Health \[at Work\]](#).
2. Suggested citation: Ghani R. Tea-breaker: a question of self-certification. *Occupational Health [at Work]* 2016/17; 13(4): 9.
3. The online poll was conducted in October 2016. A total of 122 responses were received.
4. *Occupational Health [at Work]* is published by The At Work Partnership, an independent publisher, research and training organisation, specialising in occupational health and disability at work. atworkpartnership.co.uk