Dear Secretary of State

RE – Shielded patients and fit notes

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, GPs have been working on the frontline of the response playing a key role in caring for shielded patients. We have been working to inform and support patients to navigate government guidelines and ensure they stay safe.

As lockdown rules change, and the pandemic starts to ease, many shielding patients will be encouraged by their employers to return to work. Our experience has been that employers have generally been flexible and supportive of shielded employees, but as restrictions ease GPs are experiencing an increase in patient requests for information about their working rights.

As you will be aware the Treasury’s furlough scheme covers patients that are shielding who are unable to work from home. As the scheme begins to be withdrawn, there will be a significant proportion of patients who will not to be able to physically return to work, in line with government advice, and yet will not be issued with a fit note or qualify for statutory sick pay. It is unclear how these patients will be able to financially support themselves and their families.

This uncertainty is posing difficulties for patients who as a result are asking their GPs for support in completing bureaucratic processes. For example, several GPs have reported they are receiving questions about statutory sick pay, employment protection and other areas in which they would not be expected to have the detailed knowledge required to help their patients.

It would therefore be helpful if additional guidance be provided to employers, employees and primary care to offer clarity. In particular, we would be keen to (a) establish whether shielded patients unable to work would be protected from losing their job, and (b) whether shielded patients are guaranteed a contribution of 80% of their salary when furlough ends or whether they are only guaranteed to receive statutory sick pay.

We would be more than happy to discuss further or work with your officials to resolve the issue.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]
Chair of Council