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Incorporate association not for gain. South African  
Medical Association  
Reg.No.1927/000/136/08

**The SASOM Executive Committee gave legal form to this document at a formal executive meeting on 24 February 2015. Reference :2015/2A**

## **SASOM POSITION ON MEDICAL CERTIFICATES OF FITNESS ISSUED BY OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS**

A medical certificate of fitness is a written statement issued by an occupational medicine practitioner in which the practitioner certifies an employee's suitability to perform a particular job function.

The following conditions are attached to issuing a medical certificate of fitness by occupational medicine practitioners:

1. The medical certificate of fitness shall be issued only after personally examining the employee with respect to the inherent requirements of the job and the hazards to which the employee may be exposed.
2. The occupational medicine practitioner may be assisted by duly qualified professionals, who may conduct certain components of the examination (examples include spirometry, audiometry, radiography, vision screening)
3. The medical certificate of fitness must be issued on the certifying occupational medicine practitioner's letterhead or a customised form, or where applicable, in a statutorily defined prescribed format, and should include:
  - a. Information pertaining to the certifying occupational medicine practitioner: (a) name; (b) profession; (c) registered category; (d) specialty or sub-specialty or field of professional practice (if any); (e) registered qualifications or other academic qualifications or honorary degrees in abbreviated form; (f) registration number; (g) practice code number, if applicable; (i) telephone and fax numbers; (j) addresses (including email address);
  - b. Where the certificate is not a letterhead, the occupational medicine practitioner may use a stamp to convey components of the above. The

- combination of the stamp and printed form should include all of the required information.
- c. Information pertaining to the subject of the examination and the outcome of the overall assessment:
    - i. The name of the person (subject of the assessment), and job title
    - ii. Whether or not the certificate is issued with any conditions\* or restrictions\*\*
  - d. The period of validity of the certificate
  - e. The signature of the occupational medicine practitioner who performed the examination, next to which must be the occupational medicine practitioner's printed name.
4. The following should be noted, with respect to medical certificates of fitness:
- a. The issuing of a medical certificate of fitness by any occupational medicine practitioner who did not personally perform the examination of the employee is a contravention of SA legal requirements and of the rules of the Health Professions Council of South Africa.
  - b. A medical certificate of fitness should be distinguished from a sick certificate, which is issued by any person authorized in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and which certifies the presence of an incapacity for the purposes of access to statutory sick leave.
  - c. Occupational medicine practitioners must be mindful of the restrictions placed on the use of letterheads, (whether for certificates or otherwise), by the HPCSA, especially with respect to the naming of the practice.

**\*Conditions** are factors that the employer or employee have to fulfil in order for the certificate to be valid. As long as the conditions are met, the employee may perform all aspects of the job. Examples include wearing of spectacles for lens correction, continued control of a chronic condition etc.).

**\*\* Restrictions** are factors that limit the employee from certain aspects of the job, because of the presence of incapacity, however small. Therefore there is an occupational health and safety duty on the employer to accommodate the employee's incapacity, through task restrictions. Examples include no heavy material handling, no working at heights etc.).