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e-mail: freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx

Our Reference: FOI 4624

Freedom of Information Act – Request for Information

You asked:

1) *At what point in this process does the HCP inform the claimant that they may be undertaking a wheelchair assessment? The point at which this is discussed is not covered by the WCA Handbook either.*

I am looking for the the (documented) assurance that the assessment cannot take place without a discussion with the claimant first and that it cannot in effect be undertaken in secret.

2) *How much training (hours or days) is given to HCPs to ensure specifically that they perform a wheelchair assessment within a WCA to precisely the same standards and with the same rigour as any recognised such assessment performed elsewhere?*

In answer to your questions:

Q1 The website step by step guide is a generic guide for claimants to advise them what they can expect. It does not differentiate between claimants conditionality.

The document you refer to does not exist as it is not a requirement that the assessment cannot take place without a discussion with the claimant first. All medical assessments are undertaken in total confidentiality.

Q2. All medical assessments undertaken by Healthcare Professionals are undertaken in accordance with the Atos Healthcare professional standards.

All HCPs have passed strict recruitment and experience criteria and are registered with an appropriate professional body such as the GMC, Nursing and Midwifery Council or the Health Professions Register. The DWP Chief Medical Adviser (CMA) approves HCPs to carry out assessments. Approval is dependent on strict recruitment criteria, completion of a course of training in disability assessment medicine approved by the CMA and evidence of satisfactory performance.

HCPs are also fully trained in Disability Assessment Medicine. Expertise in this field qualifies the HCP to give an impartial, independent assessment on the way in which a customer's illness or disability affects them in carrying out of a range of everyday work-related activities. Training includes the assessment of the effects of specific conditions, for example mental health, or where a condition may fluctuate. Emphasis is always placed on the differing circumstances of each individual customer. They also receive training in customer rights, equal opportunities and professional standards.

The role of the HCP is to carry out an assessment of the functional effects of the customer's disabling condition, and to utilise the information gathered to provide the DWP Decision Maker (DM) with an impartial and independent assessment. Unlike the more widely known type of medical examination, the assessment is not concerned with diagnosis or decisions about treatment, therefore specialist diagnostic qualifications are unnecessary. However a customer may submit evidence from their doctor or specialist if appropriate.

It is not possible to provide a specific answer as to the length of training completed by a HCPs as the length of training depends on a number of factors including the employment status of the individual (whether sessional or full-time) and also on the benefit type of work the HCP has been employed to undertake. In addition, once the initial training has been completed they have to complete a number of assessments that meet a specified quality threshold.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Business Management Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central FoI Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF www.ico.gov.uk