

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: xx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx

Our Ref: VTR 3166

18 November 2011

Dear J Newman,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 24 October 2011. You asked five questions which I have answered in turn below:

The main principle of a WCA is that it concentrates on a claimant's ability to work. It regards clinical condition/history as largely irrelevant and the WCA handbook instructs Atos HCPs to use drop-down menus and simplify condition/diagnosis wherever possible for the benefit of DWP Decision Makers (DMs) who are not medically trained. As part of the final assessment process, DMs consider a range of available information including information they might have researched on the internet.

1. How can a DM make an informed, accurate and robust decision if the condition they are researching has not been precisely recorded?

For example, a brain tumour may be recorded as "occasional headaches" and a serious spinal injury might be recorded as simply "back pain".

Decision makers have to consider all the available evidence, not just the name of the condition. Healthcare professionals are required to take all information into account when providing advice to the decision maker. This includes the diagnosis, medication and history of the disabling conditions including relevant investigations, social and occupational history, a typical day history and relevant clinical findings. Healthcare professionals are required to list the medical conditions as accurately as possible. In addition, they are not restricted to the use of "drop down" menus and can enter the diagnosis as "free text". It is therefore unlikely that a claimant with a brain tumour would have their condition recorded as "occasional headaches" and equally unlikely that a claimant with a serious spinal injury would have their condition recorded as "back pain".

2. Given they are not medically trained, how can DMs interpret and understand information with which they are presented if it uses highly technical medical terminology?

Atos Healthcare professionals are required to provide information in a non-technical manner, and explain any technical terms for the decision maker. This requirement was reinforced by the implementation of a recommendation contained within the first Independent Review of the WCA. Following this, all reports from Atos Healthcare now contain a personalised summary statement in plain English. In addition, if the decision maker does not understand any technical information within the report they are able to obtain clarification from a healthcare professional.

3. *Would they be expected to interpret the following, which relates to a very well known condition:*

"The estimated rates of this complication are 0.3-4% after total knee arthroplasty and 3-13% after proximal tibial osteotomy. Ischemia, mechanical irritation, traction, crush injury, and laceration can cause intraoperative injury to the peroneal nerve."

Decision makers would not be expected or required to interpret such information. They are able to obtain advice from a healthcare professional in order to interpret technical medical terminology.

4. *Not all information on the internet has been fully authenticated and therefore cannot be regarded as reliable. To which websites are DMs therefore restricted and where is this "safe" list documented?*

Decision makers are instructed to use evidence-based guidance known as customer case management which has been developed in conjunction with relevant clinical experts. The guidance is intranet-based but a copy is available on the internet. They are able to obtain advice from a healthcare professional on individual cases.

5. *In many cases medical opinion on a particular condition and its short/long term effects can be divided and revolve around some very complicated features of the complaint. How does a DM resolve such dilemmas?*

Decision makers are able to obtain advice from an Atos Healthcare professional for interpretation of medical evidence.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol 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@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, 5th Floor The Adelphi, 1-11, John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT. 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