

Dear J Newman,

You wrote to us and stated:

Please pass this on to the person who conducts Freedom of Information reviews.

I am writing to request an internal review of Department for Work and Pensions's handling of my FOI request 'The role of GPs in the WCA Process' as you have not addressed all of the points in full.

Thank you for your reply and I will take your points in turn. There are a few questions and some corrections to what you have said for your information.

However, it is first important to explain to you that a GP's training is not nearly as narrow as you suggest. As the BMA's website points out, employers frequently request an occupational health report from an employee's GP for pre-employment purposes or as part of an assessment of a current employee's fitness to work, so clearly they are adequately qualified in this area.

Some employers do (perhaps in addition) commission the services of someone else, but this person is familiar with the workplaces relevant to the particular employer and make their assessments accordingly on an individual basis. They do not make generalised assessments with no indication of what the work is and what the work entails. They also consider the broader context of work – for example, the reliability an individual's condition allows them to offer, problems travelling to and from work etc. again all on a case by case basis.

You are therefore wrong to say that GPs are inadequately qualified to make FFW judgements.

Q1: Your response does not answer the question. You have an experienced doctor trained over 7+ years and highly qualified providing information to (potentially) a much less qualified HCP and an administrator. Clearly they simply will not understand a good proportion of it.

Q2: You are wrong. An Atos HCP might be no more than a Physiotherapist who is NOT regarded as clinically qualified. Also, in other Fol responses you have stated categorically that Atos HCPs DO NOT NEED TO BE CLINICALLY QUALIFIED (in your opinion) – a complete contradiction of what you have said here.

Q4/Q7: GPs are all trained in the same way to the same standard, so in acknowledging some have this expertise you must also accept they all do. In contrast here and elsewhere you have suggested none of them do and your entire process reflects this false assumption.

Q5: In deciding entitlement to ESA, a DM is also deciding my fitness to work. However you word it, an administrator with no medical training is making decisions involving potentially complex medical conditions. There is no other example where this absurdity would be allowed to take place – rather like your GP's receptionist being given responsibility for prescribing your medication.

Q6: Let me re-phrase. Do DWP's policies and imperatives anywhere clarify to a DM that their first priority is always a claimant's health and well-being? Despite its obvious importance, I have been unable to find it in any of the references you have sent me. Also, a GP's behaviour is largely dictated by the Hippocratic Oath. As DMs are able to countermand a GP's opinion, you would expect them to have signed-up to something identical. What and where is it? Again, there is nothing of this nature in the references you have supplied to date.

A full history of my FOI request and all correspondence is available on the Internet at this address:

http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/the_role_of_gps_in_the_wca_proce

I should like to point out that Freedom of Information is about the provision of non-personal recorded information. It is not about answering questions or entering into discussions about particular matters. I should note that questions and discussions are matters for other business channels.

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 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