

Disability Benefits and Medical Evidence: Making it easier for health professionals



Timetable

- ***Aim: to present and identify ways of providing medical evidence to support claims/appeals in the most efficient way***

1/	Presentation: The Problem	15 mins
2/	Presentation: Guidance on writing a letter	30 mins
3/	Group work and feedback:	30 mins



The Problem

Many people who claim disability-related benefits like Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) struggle to secure timely and relevant documentary evidence from health professionals to support their claims.

THE TASK

From the claimant's point of view:

- I need to claim a disability benefit to help me have enough money to live on
- If I am going to get PIP, ESA or DLA for my child, I need to prove entitlement
- The best way of doing this is by making sure I have supporting medical evidence



CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

From the claimant's point of view:

- If I can't get my disability benefit, I risk e.g.
 - Not being able to pay my priority expenses
 - Not being able to participate in my community
 - The deterioration of my mental and/or physical health* (and maybe more visits to the doctor)
 - Going into debt
 - Losing my independence
 - Other things?

Benefits are of fundamental importance to people



Deterioration in mental health

- Research (Marks, 2017) reports that the Work Capability Assessments (WCA) for people with mental health problems lead directly to a deterioration in mental health and increased suicidal ideation
- This is backed up by reports from the Mental Health Foundation in 2015 that found that 43.2% of people who applied for ESA made a suicide attempt after failing the WCA



What barriers are there to me getting the medical evidence I need for my benefit claim?

- Some medical professionals charge
- Some haven't got the time to help
- Some might view my request for help as an inconvenience
- Some don't know what to provide - nor do I
- Some tell me that they don't need to provide evidence to me because the DWP will contact them if they need something, but DWP don't always contact them or ask the right questions



Why can't the benefits authorities be relied on to obtain all the relevant evidence they need?

- From Citizens Advice's point of view:
 - DWP does not reliably seek medical evidence
 - The face-to-face assessments by health care professionals are not a reliable mechanism for ensuring that claimants are able to explain their circumstances
 - The claiming process is not fit for purpose - most advice agencies report a success rate well in excess of 50% (often 70-90%) for challenging decisions, suggesting that the process fails to ensure that all the relevant evidence is secured



From Citizens Advice point of view

- The complex rules for disability related benefits make it very difficult to ensure that medical evidence is *relevant* to entitlement
- Detailed requests for evidence from advice agencies can be seen as *leading*
- Medical professionals might not always see assisting with medical evidence as a priority
- **But** obtaining the right evidence at the right time can mean that decisions don't have to be challenged and can save further calls on medical professionals for further help later



Westcountry Community Psychology: Guidance on writing a good letter of support

- Westcountry Community Psychology: About us
- Why letters of support are important
- How a letter can help
- Guidance
- Templates
- Points system



Thank you

Citizens Advice Teignbridge

Westcountry Community Psychology



Citizens Advice Teignbridge: We're easy to find

We can be found in

- Market Walk, Newton Abbot
- The Library, Teignmouth
- The Manor House, Dawlish

Or call

- 03444 111 444

Or online

- citizensadviceteignbridge.org.uk

