

A SENSE OF BETRAYAL

Mo Stewart

No civilian has any comprehension of life in British military forces, or the impact of the removal of that life when unexpectedly returned to 'Civvy Street' following the onset of a permanent illness or a profound disability, with the gradual realisation that support in the civilian world means that the disabled veteran is just one of a crowd.

There is a period of adjustment. For many disabled veterans there is also the onset of a mental health problem that may well last years, as the sense of loss of the military support network adds to their daily burden of dealing with the onset of a permanent illness or disability and a broken quality of life.

There was a time when the British government demonstrated a duty of care to disabled military veterans. The award of a War Pension (WP) was an indicator of that duty of care, with disabled veterans awarded a pension for life to acknowledge their sacrifice whilst serving the nation in military uniform. A WP is not a benefit and any review of a WP is to acknowledge a deterioration in health or increased disability, and is not an indication of the ability to work in paid employment. Severely disabled veterans were guaranteed financial support, with help to claim additional support via the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) that opened the door to a Motability vehicle and independence with support from the Department for Work and Pensions. (DWP).

This all changed in 2005 when the WP was replaced by the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, and support for older working-age disabled veterans was gradually reduced over time. Until 2008, all reviews of the WP were conducted by experienced former military doctors who conducted detailed, clinically accurate examinations. Unfortunately governments change, as does government policy. Now, civil servants at the veterans' agency think it appropriate to arrange for an unaccountable corporate giant to conduct an inappropriate Work Capability Assessment¹ (WCA), which is used to assess work capability, simply because civil servants now have a priority to reduce costs rather than support disabled veterans.

It took two years to successfully challenge the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency's (SPVA) 2008 inaccurate decision regarding my WP, as the anonymous visiting doctor had conducted a WCA instead of a WP review and concluded that my health had not deteriorated. The WCA is a discredited

assessment model, co-designed by a notorious corporate healthcare insurance giant, and used since 2008 to resist funding DWP disability benefits.² The WCA is totally unrelated to the detailed clinical assessment used for a review of a WP, and this veteran went to war with the SPVA to prove it.

With a background in healthcare, my experience of a visiting doctor from a corporate giant conducting a WCA instead of a WP review introduced me to the world of research, first to challenge the SPVA, who were once very supportive of disabled veterans but who, as of 2008, decided we were all suddenly governed by greed so all applications for a WP review were treated with suspicion.

The research proved to be the answer for this disabled WRAF veteran when in a battle for survival, with the discovered evidence reported to disability support networks via the internet. Written for the benefit of the lay reader, who is unfamiliar with mainstream academic texts, the research reports proved very popular and have been reproduced on many support websites over the past six years.²

Disabled veterans medically discharged before 2005 are now also at the mercy of Atos Healthcare medical staff, who conduct in excess of 800,000 government 'medical assessments' annually on anyone in receipt of disability benefits. Atos Healthcare claim to employ the largest number of doctors outside of the NHS, yet they enjoy 'total immunity from any medical regulation' according to the General Medical Council and the Care Quality Commission. Meanwhile, the DWP remain resistant to overwhelming evidence from the national front line charities that the chronically sick and disabled people of this nation are reduced to being little more than government statistics; to be removed from the increasing costs of the welfare budget... By definition when care, concern, compassion and human dignity are removed from 'medical assessment' the only thing left is medical tyranny. This is yet another example of civil servants and politicians dreaming up regulations about a vast subject area they clearly know nothing about, not least because they are invariably able bodied. Appeals against the inadequate Atos assessments are possible but, when so many people are already so ill, and the appeal system is close to collapse with waiting times of up to a year, this Atos assessment system is clearly totally inadequate and as far away as possible from any genuine medical assessment.

Disability Denial Factories Working Well In The UK²

Mo Stewart, June 2012

The research reports and articles² exposed the betrayal of not only disabled British military forces, but of all chronically sick and disabled people dependent upon the government for disability income. By November 2014, I was invited to provide the keynote speech at the launch of the 2014 Disability History Month, exposing the betrayal of older disabled veterans by the British government:³

This unexpected threat to this nation's working-age War Pensioners was despite the fact that I received a personal telecom from the Cabinet Office, claiming that the Cabinet '...had just agreed that all War Pensioners could keep their DLA for life and will not be reassessed, as an acknowledgement of their service to the nation.' Then, the very nervous caller asked me what this decision would mean for my research?

Twelve months later, it seems the 'phone call from the Cabinet Office was an attempt to stop the research and, being naive, I didn't anticipate that the DWP would now threaten 80,000 working age War Pensioners because my integrity was not for sale. All disabled veterans were disabled serving this nation and all War Pensioners should be treated the same, regardless of age, and be allowed to retain the promised access to DLA for life.

War and Impairment ~ the social consequences of disablement³

Keynote speech.

Mo Stewart, November 2014

In the report Welfare Reform ~ Redress For The Disabled⁴, the evidence identified that reports from the frontline national charities were dismissed by the DWP. The government priority to reduce the welfare budget meant adopting the WCA and disregarding all evidence against it that demonstrated that the assessment was deeply flawed and creating preventable harm for those least able to cope, with the constant threat that their financial support could be removed at the whim of a civil servant. Even the detailed annual reports by the President of the Appeal Tribunals, who challenged the WCA, were totally disregarded by the DWP.⁴

As a former healthcare professional, and now an independent disability studies researcher, I have no difficulty comprehending the onset of mental health problems for disabled veterans forced to leave

the security of their military family and faced with a civilian society, where neoliberal politics has replaced need with greed, where everything has a price and care, compassion and humanity are all in very short supply.⁵

My work is now very well known by the disabled community and I enjoy contact with a lot of distinguished academics from a variety of universities, whose detailed and often significant research evidence is confined to academic journals that few outside the academic world will access. Through the publication of articles and reports⁶, I have been able to offer access to mainstream academic research and bring it to the attention of the general public⁷, which academics appreciate.

Following over six years of independent research, the book '*Cash Not Care ~ the planned demolition of the UK welfare state*'⁸ exposed the American template used for the introduction of the British welfare reforms. This requires chronically sick and disabled people, and the unemployed, to prove that they are worthy of the DWP benefit income and includes harsh sanctions for minor infringements, as the British welfare state is covertly transformed to welfare to be eventually funded by private healthcare insurance without any mandate by the British people.

Her paper 'The Second Phase of US Welfare Reform, 2000-2006: Blaming the poor again?' demonstrated the savage American social security policies as now replicated in the UK.

The key findings of the Daguerre 2008 paper make for disturbing if expected reading, and confirmed this researcher's experience to date. Quite clearly, the reforms introduced by previous UK administrations, and especially since Cameron became Prime Minister, are a replica of the 'welfare' reforms as adopted in America and introduced in the UK by misleading the British people.

Cash Not Care ~ the planned demolition of the UK welfare state⁸

Mo Stewart, 2016

New Generation Publishing

Unless and until the government acknowledge the preventable harm created by the adoption of welfare reforms influenced by a notorious American healthcare insurance giant⁸, and begin to accept the detailed evidence provided by mainstream academic research, I suspect that the increase in the numbers of people suffering from a mental health problem will continue to rise as the most vulnerable

people in society plunge into anxiety and despair, and disabled veterans are exposed to the fact that the British government fails to uphold the armed forces covenant.

REFERENCES

1. Atos Healthcare or Disability Denial Factories: summary. Stewart June 2010
<http://www.whywaitforever.com/dwpatosveteranssummary.html>
2. Disability Denial Factories Working Well In The UK. Stewart 2012
<http://blacktrianglecampaign.org/2011/05/29/disability-denial-factories-working-uk/>
3. War and Impairment ~ the social consequences of disablement. Stewart 2014
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mo_Stewart/publications
4. Welfare Reform ~ Redress For The Disabled. Stewart 2011
<http://www.whywaitforever.com/dwpatosveterans.html#wres>
5. 'First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? A longitudinal ecological study. Barr et al 2015
<http://jech.bmj.com/content/early/2015/10/26/jech-2015-206209.full>
6. The influence of the private insurance industry on the UK welfare reforms. Stewart 2015
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mo_Stewart/publications
7. Preventable harm is government policy. Stewart 2016
<http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/preventable-harm-government-policy>
8. Cash Not Care ~ the planned demolition of the UK welfare state. Stewart 2016
ISBN: 978-1-78507-783-8 New Generation Publishing

© Emerald Group Publishing Limited 2017

Journal of Public Mental Health Volume 16, Issue 1, A Sense Of Betrayal

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/JPMH-05-2016-0023>

