

THE HIDDEN AGENDA

a research summary by Mo Stewart

The Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is exclusively conducted on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by the corporate giant Atos Origin IT Ltd Medical Services, better known as Atos Healthcare. This 'non-medical assessment' was introduced in 2008 by the Labour government, and was identified as a 'medical examination' to be used to identify genuine claimants for long term sickness and disability benefit. However, what was unknown at the time was the fact that the WCA was a continuation of the planned agenda of the previous Thatcher government, whose ultimate goal was the destruction of the Welfare State.⁽¹⁾

The WCA was promoted as a 'fitness for work' assessment for claimants of what was once known as Incapacity Benefit, now re-named as the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). In reality, in order to reduce the welfare budget, the WCA was designed to resist as many sickness benefit claims as possible regardless of confirmed and identified permanent illness or disability. By 2010 the planned DWP welfare budget reduction was deemed to be too slow. The new Coalition Government enhanced the WCA and, following the previous Labour Government's lead, it became much more difficult to qualify for the ESA⁽²⁾ as the WCA totally disregarded diagnosis, prognosis or limited life expectancy.

Aided and abetted by the national press, using insidious press headlines to manipulate public opinion^{(3)(3b)}, the Coalition Government successfully introduced tyranny, fear and despair to the nation's most vulnerable people, using a disability assessment model as designed in consultation with Unum [Provident] Insurance; one of the most discredited corporate insurance giants in the world.^{(4)(4b)} At the same time, reported disability hate crimes in the United Kingdom (UK) were rising to record levels.⁽⁵⁾

The first two years of independent research into the WCA concluded at the end of November 2011 with the exposure of two government memorandums provided by Unum Provident Insurance.⁽⁶⁾ Initially, the link between the UK welfare reforms and the likely move to an insurance based benefits system was identified by Baroness Tanni Gray-Thompson during the welfare reform debates in the House of Lords.⁽⁷⁾ Nine months later, the link between Atos Healthcare and Unum Insurance was exposed by Kevin Brennan MP during debate in Westminster Hall⁽⁸⁾ and, more recently, during an emergency Backbench Business debate in the House of Commons (HOC), Michael Meacher MP identified the possible influence of Unum Insurance with the UK Government.⁽⁹⁾

Of course, this destruction of the welfare state could never have been so readily achieved without the unelected former Labour adviser, David Freud. He was ennobled to permit appointment initially to the Shadow Cabinet but, following the 2010 General Election, he was appointed as the Minister for Welfare Reform for the Coalition where he has excelled. Indeed, one of Lord Freud's most recent claims was that: "*Poor people should be prepared to take more risks because they have the least to lose...*"⁽¹¹⁾ Clearly, this man is yet another millionaire Minister who demonstrates no concern, and no comprehension, of human need.

The ongoing DWP medical tyranny, masquerading as welfare reform, has permitted Atos Healthcare to conduct the WCA by employing the totally discredited Bio-Psychosocial (BPS) model of disability assessment that remains free from all public accountability according to the General Medical Council and the Care Quality Commission. The BPS is the assessment model as used by Unum Insurance when assessing healthcare insurance claims, and it is also the assessment model enthusiastically promoted by Professor Sir Mansel Aylward. The Professor is the Director of the Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research at Cardiff University, initially sponsored by Unum Insurance from its inception in 2003 to 2009. However, prior to his move to the Centre, the Professor was the DWP's Chief Medical Officer who, in 1992, was in post when Unum Insurance was invited to become corporate 'advisers' to the UK government.⁽¹²⁾

Whilst the BPS model is an interesting theory, the selective use of the BPS model of disability assessment, as used by both Unum Insurance and Atos Healthcare, was exposed long ago as an invention of the insurance industry.⁽¹³⁾⁽¹⁴⁾ By concentrating on the psychological model of disability, to the detriment of the social model, the WCA was always destined to promote unacceptable results for many thousands of ESA claimants. In one six month period alone 37,100 people had waited up to a year to have their ESA benefit reinstated following appeal, yet no-one is asking what would have happened to these genuinely sick and disabled people if they had not had the strength to pursue their claim to appeal?⁽¹⁰⁾ Indeed, a recent Panorama documentary: '*Disabled or Faking It*',⁽²⁸⁾ demonstrated quite categorically the dangers of the WCA with seriously ill patients, diagnosed with life threatening conditions such as heart failure and end stage emphysema, being found fit for work.⁽¹⁵⁾

However, with the national press still refusing to expose the identified influence of Unum Insurance with the DWP welfare reforms, the British public remain in ignorance as the government covertly convert the UK welfare state into the American healthcare system, ultimately to be funded by private insurance.⁽¹²⁾⁽¹³⁾⁽¹⁴⁾ Meanwhile, Unum Insurance is happy to continue to offer new careers to former government 'advisers'.⁽¹⁶⁾

The WCA is an American imported 'disability assessment model' and has no medical credibility whatsoever, as confirmed by the British Medical Association(17), yet it is enthusiastically employed by the DWP and causes devastation to those least able to protest. This 'medical assessment' is working very well as the thousands of genuine claimants that have either died, committed suicide, been forced into poverty due to mounting debt, or who have developed a mental health problem due to anxiety are now the disregarded victims.(10) Many had been in receipt of Incapacity Benefit before being re-assessed by Atos Healthcare, using the fatally flawed WCA, only to fail to qualify for benefit following 'assessment'. The Internet provides evidence to this government imposed suffering at a cost to the tax-payer of £110million per annum for the confidential Atos contract and an estimated £60 million pounds per annum, and rising, for the costs of the appeal tribunals. Yet, still, Members of Parliament (MP) continue with their very courteous and diplomatic debates(8)(9) as the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and, especially, their corporate partners all celebrate the ongoing planned destruction of the welfare state that appears to be unstoppable.

What is still disregarded is the fact that Professor Sir Mansel Aylward's research activities were funded for six years by Unum Insurance.(12) Indeed, due to his significant contribution to the future reduction of the DWP welfare budget by promoting the use of a 'non-medical' assessment, the Professor was rewarded with a Knighthood for "services to disability assessment." Therefore, his support for the BPS disability assessment model was presumed to be guaranteed. Yet, when confronted six months ago, the Professor actually confirmed that he now considered the BPS model to be "**unsatisfactory**" and that he believed it "**no longer addresses the real needs of disabled people and the exclusion of disabled people from society**".(18)

Of course, the question remains as to why there was no official DWP announcement following this amazing change of 'expert' professional opinion, as the entire national press totally disregarded the press release that was distributed last September following *Sir Mansel's* unexpected statement. Perhaps the Professor was safe in the knowledge that the press release would be ignored, and perhaps this is why he continues to travel widely, still lecturing about the virtues of the totally discredited BPS model of disability assessment? The most recent lecture was at the Health and Wellbeing at Work Conference in Birmingham, from 5th-6th March 2013,(19) where Professor Sir Mansel Aylward was listed as a keynote speaker on the subject of: **The New Public Health Agenda: Its Impact on Health and Wellbeing at Work**. Given the title of his speech, one can only presume that the Professor has yet to advise other professionals of his reported change of expert opinion.(18)

This is how the UK welfare state will be destroyed. There is a BPS 'expert' in place, and an American corporate insurance giant has influenced the UK Government to totally disregard human suffering, in favour of a reduced welfare budget, using an identified bogus 'medical assessment'. Unum Insurance have begun their mass marketing to encourage able bodied members of the British public to invest in their 'Income Protection Insurance' or their 'Back-up Plan,' that's only available via the workplace, and these are the healthcare insurance policies that the company has historically tried very hard to resist funding when a claim is made.(20)(21)

Given that the unacceptable practice of Unum Insurance was previously exposed by MPs during a House of Commons debate in 1999(22), the question remains as to why was this highly discredited American corporate insurance giant ever permitted to influence UK welfare reforms and why the national press, en masse, refuse to expose this insurance company's confirmed influence despite it being identified by a BBC News report in 2007?(23) The recent exposure of a 2005 internal Unum report, that actively boasted that the company was '**driving government thinking**' regarding the reform of Incapacity Benefit (24) leads to the much more sinister possibility that the DWP are simply administrators of these brutal welfare reforms, and that the perpetrators of the devastation caused to the victims of this UK government funded medical tyranny are, in fact, Unum Insurance. Michael O'Donnell was the author of the 2005 internal Unum report that was written when he was the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Unum Insurance. Michael O'Donnell is now the CMO for Atos Healthcare.....

The difficulty remains that no-one is asking the relevant questions. Perhaps MPs should be asking the Prime Minister why he's been funded by 'healthcare companies' to the value of £750,000(27) since he became Prime Minister (25) or why every report produced by the President of the Appeal Tribunals, all of which identified the Atos Healthcare WCA assessments as "**failing to coincide with reality**", was totally disregarded by the DWP? (12)

Until and unless more significant questions are asked in the House of Commons, victims of this government funded medical nightmare will be forced to turn to the law for help, just as in America. (26) Until and unless the national press demonstrate that the UK really does benefit from a free press, and not a government controlled press, the most vulnerable of all British people will continue to suffer and the British public will continue to be deceived. (12)

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