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A sense of betrayal

Mo Stewart

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Abstract

Purpose – 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 profound disability, with the gradual realisation that support in the civilian world means that a disabled veteran is just one of a crowd. The paper aims to discuss this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – Participant observation.

Findings – Welfare reforms together with austerity measures introduced by the British government are causing preventable harm to the most vulnerable in society.

Research limitations/implications – This paper was written by invitation and is limited by word length.

Practical implications – Older working-age disabled veterans are being abandoned by the state and suffer due to a change in government social policy.

Social implications – Disregarding the suffering and preventable harm created in society by the ongoing welfare reforms will have consequences that will need to be addressed as a matter of urgency, as the often tragic consequences are eventually alerted to the public.

Originality/value – A demonstration that the older working-age disabled veterans are being harmed by welfare reforms and the armed forces covenant has been breached.

Keywords Mental health, Disabled veterans, Work Capability Assessment (WCA), War Pension

Paper type Case study

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 the pension, 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 Assessment (WCA), which is used to assess work capability (Stewart, 2010), because civil servants now have a priority to reduce costs rather than support disabled veterans. Help is disappearing. DLA is to stop and is being replaced by the Personal Independence Payment (PIP),

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but with government changes to eligibility, there are many horror stories as DLA is removed, claimants are not awarded PIP, and now disabled people lose their jobs and independence as their Motability car is withdrawn (BBC News, 2016).

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 from a corporate giant 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 an American corporate healthcare insurance giant, and used since 2008 to resist funding DWP disability benefits (Stewart, 2012). 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 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, treated all applications for a WP review with suspicion when following imposed government welfare reforms.

The research proved to be the answer for this disabled Women's Royal Air Force (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 lay readers, who are unfamiliar with mainstream academic texts, the research reports proved very popular (Stewart, 2012) and have been reproduced on many support websites over the past six years.

The research reports and articles exposed the betrayal of not only disabled WRAF veterans and other British military forces, but of all working-age chronically sick and disabled people dependent upon the government for disability income. The government were alerted to the impact of the research. By November 2014, I was invited to provide the keynote speech at the launch of the 2014 Disability History Month (Stewart, 2014):

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 disablement, Keynote speech, Disability History Month 2014).

As a former healthcare professional, 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 (Barr *et al.*, 2016).

My research is now very well known by the disabled community and I enjoy contact with many 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 reports (Stewart, 2015), I have been able to offer access to mainstream academic research and bring it to the attention of the general public (Stewart, 2016a), which academics appreciate.

Following over six years of independent research, the book *Cash Not Care: The Planned Demolition of the UK Welfare State* (Stewart, 2016b) 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 without any mandate by the British people to welfare to be eventually funded by private healthcare insurance:

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 state, New Generation Publishing, 2016).

Unless and until the government acknowledge the preventable harm created by the adoption of welfare reforms copied from 1996 American Social Security policies (Stewart, 2016b), 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.

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