

The Work Capability Assessment Is The Adoption Of Disability Denial

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WHILST THE WORLD is distracted by the global pandemic, and the United Kingdom (UK) is adjusting to the reality of Brexit, there is an ongoing public health crisis created by social policy reforms and austerity measures which is being totally disregarded by successive administrations. Those in greatest need who are unfit or unable to work now live in fear of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who first adopted the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA) in 2008 to successfully limit access to long-term out-of-work disability benefit, with often fatal consequences.¹

The WCA is not a medical assessment, which is an incorrect assumption often claimed by politicians, journalists and academics. Influenced by corporate America, the WCA is the adoption of a biopsychosocial (BPS) model of assessment, which is the invention of the health insurance industry to limit access to claims, and is identified as being a “*non-medical functional assessment*”; which disregards all clinical opinion and failed all academic scrutiny.^{1,2} The initial introduction of the WCA by the Labour administration in 2008 was the adoption of disability denial, and was guaranteed to cause preventable harm as those in greatest need are treated with suspicion by the DWP, as a consequence of the adoption of neoliberal politics.

Neoliberal politics is the politics of power, profit and greed with an emphasis on a small state,³ and this right-leaning ideology has swept the world and influenced social policies in all 38 member countries of the OECD (OECD 2003).⁴ Neoliberal politics was first adopted in the UK by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and was guaranteed to cause preventable harm to those in greatest need as Thatcher insisted that the welfare state was an unacceptable financial burden to the public purse.⁵

Following Thatcher’s long reign as Prime Minister, in 1994 the John Major Conservative administration appointed the second largest income replacement health insurance company in America as welfare claims managers, and so began corporate America’s influence with future UK social policies, as UnumProvident Insurance co-designed UK disability benefit assessments with identified catastrophic human consequences.¹ Subsequently, social policies were adopted by successive administrations to create Thatcher’s stated political ambition, which is the future demolition of the UK welfare state;² with long-term sickness and disability benefit to be funded by private income replacement health insurance, similar to the American system of funding health and welfare support to replace “*state paternalism*”.⁶

Similar to its use by the health insurance industry, the adoption of a BPS model of assessment for the fatally flawed WCA was used to restrict access to disability benefit. The WCA is dangerous. It disregards diagnosis, prognosis, past medical history and prescribed medicines; which guaranteed that many of those in greatest need would perish, often by suicide.

Hence, the introduction of the WCA was ideologically motivated with the political expectation that, if disability benefits were made as difficult as possible to access, the purchase of private health insurance would increase - which has yet to be established.

Relevant websites:

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/>

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mo-Stewart/publications>

<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/about-us/centre-fellows/mo-stewart.html>

References

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5. Gamble A (1988): Privatization, Thatcherism and the British State *Journal of Law and Society Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 1988, pp. 1-20*
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