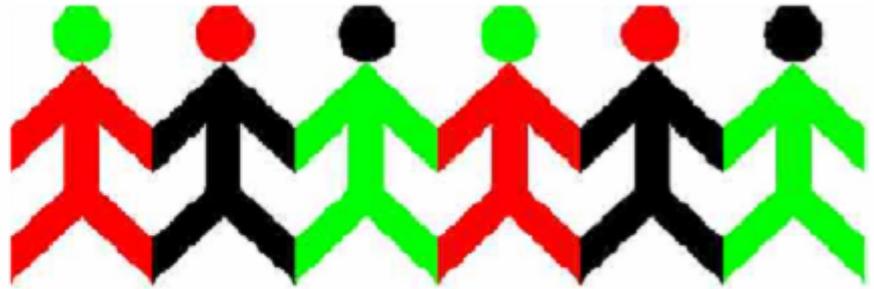




BOURNEMOUTH & POOLE



ANTI CUTS COALITION

We reject the cuts as simply malicious ideological vandalism hitting the most vulnerable the hardest - Join us in this struggle

STOP ATOS

Sick and disabled people throughout the country live in real fear of when the next brown envelope from the DWP will drop through their door.

31 people have died in the previous three years while appealing against decisions that they were able to work

WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENTS

Between Jan & Aug '11, on average 32 people died every week who the government had declared could be helped back into work in the medium term

40% of people who've appealed against assessments stating they were "fit for work" have had the decision overturned via tribunal which has cost around £60m. Despite this, Atos Healthcare has recently been awarded a £400m govt contract

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To receive ESA (Employment and Support Allowance), the vast majority of claimants have to pass a Working Capability Assessment (WCA) – a short medical test carried out by government contractor Atos Healthcare. The WCA is so consistently failing to recognise those who are in dire need of support that it is hard to understand why society is not in uproar. Appeals against incorrect WCA decisions are costing £50m a year. According to the government's own statistics, appeals find in favour of the claimant in at least 30% of cases, – although Neil Bateman, a welfare adviser featured on BBC's Panorama, believes this rises to a staggering 80-90% if the appellant seeks the help of an experienced adviser.

People who are fit and healthy are unlikely to have heard of the company Atos. But anyone who has had to apply for sickness benefits may find that the name triggers – according to one MP – a sense of "fear and loathing".

Atos Healthcare has won govt contracts worth more than £400m to carry out these tests. A smaller contract was won by the outsourcing company Capita. The record of Atos Healthcare over the initial period of the policy's roll-out has been heavily criticised by disability charities. The General Medical Council is investigating doctors who work for Atos. Some have already left.

It is this government's laissez faire attitude to whether those thrown off sickness benefits are able to move into the workplace that makes campaigners believe that underlying the harshness of this medical test is a desire to reduce the welfare bill at any cost and achieving the level of saving required would mean cutting about 500,000 people from the benefit roll, which would lead to arbitrary judgments being made.

The medical test in its current form isn't fit for purpose, and the government's contract with Atos Healthcare isn't providing the value for money that taxpayers deserve. It is reasonable that the government suspends its relentless reassessment of 11,000 sickness benefits claimants every week until practical changes can be made to the medical test that protect the genuinely sick and disabled.

If you are asked to go for a test:

- Take a friend with you. Ask them to take notes.
- Look up the questions beforehand on the internet.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau or your local benefits advice may be able to help you.

For more information and useful links, please visit: bpacc.co.uk/atos

Source: Guardian, BBC, DPAC