

Healthcare professionals

March 2009 update

Employment and
Support Allowance

Working for  a better life

In October 2008, Employment and Support Allowance replaced the existing system of incapacity benefits for new customers.

Employment and Support Allowance provides financial support to disabled people or individuals with a health condition that affects their ability to work. For those able to prepare for work, it ensures their individual needs are recognised. Support offered includes groundbreaking Condition Management Programmes delivered through the Pathways to Work Programme, which is designed to complement the support provided by a patient's GP and other healthcare professionals.

How does Employment and Support Allowance affect healthcare professionals?

Employment and Support Allowance does not mean significant changes to interaction with patients, nor to the paperwork GPs need to complete. Some of the forms have changed slightly and guidance notes for their completion have been sent to each practice and are also available on our website.

- GPs will still be asked to provide '**statements of incapacity for work**' (usually on form Med 3) until the independent Work Capability Assessment (see below) is carried out.
- GPs may also be asked to complete form **ESA113** – similar to form IB113 – for patients with a severe disability, who might be entitled to benefit without the need for a face-to-face assessment. For guidance on completing this form, please visit <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/healthandwork/guidance.asp>

What involvement do healthcare professionals have in the process of deciding a patient's eligibility for the allowance?

The decision to award Employment and Support Allowance is made by expert decision-makers, based on a range of information, evidence and independent medical advice, including the forms provided by a patient's GP. The type of information GPs are asked to provide remains the same, however it is of course important that the right level of detail is included and guidance notes available in your GP practice or on our website will facilitate this.

How are patients assessed?

Employment and Support Allowance customers will join one of two groups, depending on their capability for work. Those individuals whom it is reasonable to expect to prepare for work will join the '**Work-Related Activity Group**'. They will attend up to six work-focused interviews with a personal adviser to ensure they receive appropriate support, through the Pathways to Work Programme. If the effects of an individual's health condition or disability are so severe that it would be unreasonable to expect them to prepare for work, they will join the '**Support Group**'. These individuals will not be required to prepare for work (although they can volunteer for support) and will receive additional financial help.

Most patients will be assessed through an independent **Work Capability Assessment**. It will be carried out by specially trained healthcare professionals and not the patient's GP. As part of that assessment, we identify the health-related support that patients may need to help them prepare for work and we provide patients with a report from this part of the assessment. This is called the work-focused health-related assessment. We feel that this aspect of the assessment is most relevant to your work as a healthcare professional.

Healthcare professionals will not automatically receive patient information coming from the Work Capability Assessment. Individuals may choose to share a report from their work-focused health-related assessment with you, which may complement the longer-term care you provide.

What exactly does the work-focused health-related assessment involve?

The aim of the work-focused health-related assessment is to explore the patient's own views about moving into work and the support they need to help them get there, covering topics including:

- the impact of the patient's health on their daily life
- the patient's view of their future, from a health and work perspective
- the activities the patient enjoys or would like to take up to help their work prospects; and
- the support they feel would help them achieve their goal of moving into work.

What support is available to help individuals prepare for work?

Through their personal adviser and the Pathways to Work **Condition Management Programme**, individuals in the Work-Related Activity Group will be given support appropriate to their personal needs. Condition Management Programmes do not replicate current NHS treatment; the focus is on personal support rather than clinical intervention. The aim is to educate, support and advise customers on how to manage their condition and to improve their functional ability using the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Healthcare professionals deliver the programme and tailor it to meet the individuals' needs. The duration of a programme depends on the nature of the condition and type of support required but will typically last between 4-13 weeks.

Expected outcomes are that the customer:

- understands more about his/her condition and how it can be safely managed in a work setting;
- through exploring the health benefits of returning to work and strategies for dealing with the condition, feels more confident about seeking work and the prospect of remaining in work; and
- will recognise the early signs of a relapse or worsening of the condition and is better able to take appropriate, timely steps to seek help and/or reasonable workplace adjustments.

Programme content is jointly agreed between Jobcentre Plus and the NHS/Department of Health (DH) and is aimed at improving the customer's understanding of their health condition and how that condition can be managed within a work environment. It may include:

- **Expert health advice** – on managing health better when seeking and in work
- **Workshops** – run by healthcare specialists and covering topics such as:
 - Health management (including understanding your health condition and its impact; healthy eating; assisted exercise and mobility programmes)
 - Coping with pain
 - Stress, anxiety and relaxation
 - Fear of failure/positive mood management/motivational support
 - Building confidence and assertiveness
 - Benefits of work, interview skills and preparation

The patient's story

Until April 2008, Samantha worked as a night care assistant, when she badly injured her right knee. Because of her lack of mobility and pain, she has not been able to return to work.

Samantha had been paid Statutory Sick Pay, but when this came to an end, she made a claim for Employment and Support Allowance over the phone: 'I was surprised how easy it was. I just told them what had happened to me and they filled out the form at their end. I got the medical assessment paperwork quickly and I received my first payment around two weeks later.'

Samantha attended her Work Capability Assessment in her local town: 'I didn't know what to expect but the doctor was really friendly and explained the three parts of the assessment and I got to take away the health-related part of the assessment at the end. I'm going to take this to my GP so that she can see what has been recommended.'

Samantha has attended her first work-focused interview with a personal adviser in her local Jobcentre and will shortly start her Pathways to Work Programme. This will involve five more interviews, once a month, to ensure that she receives the right support and Condition Management Programmes to get her back into work as soon as she is able.

For more information on Employment and Support Allowance visit www.dwp.gov.uk/esa (or www.dsdni.gov.uk/esa in Northern Ireland).