

ATOS Medical Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

Having been diagnosed 3 years ago with anxiety and depression and been trying to recover since, the DWP ATOS Medical is something I dread and has a massive negative impact on my mental health and recovery.

I had my first ATOS Medical in late 2009, where they were more interested in whether I could touch my toes. I scored only 3 points in relation to my Inflammatory Bowel disease rather than my mental health problems. Luckily my appeal was successful and so I was placed into the work related group of ESA.

It transpired at a Job Centre Plus interview recently, that the 'system' had overlooked me and so I have just had my second ATOS Medical (November 2012).

I have had a really hard 2 weeks since getting the appointment letter for my medical. This involved severe depths of depression, suicidal thoughts, overwhelming anxiety and I was all consumed by the impending medical.

My wife supports me greatly, suffers my horrible behaviour and accompanied me to the medical, which was at 4pm so I had all day to get seriously worked up.

I was more prepared for the medical this time. I took all my medications, even my tooth guard for excessive grinding during sleep, got as much clarity as I could on what I needed to say, put all my positive thoughts (thanks to Solution Focused Brief Therapy) out of my head and focused on the negatives, talk about counter productive for my mental health.

The medical was by a 'nurse' with no empathy and probable interest, I was careful, answering the questions about: do I go out, can I go out on my own etc, as I can - occasionally on a good day and spur of the moment, but if I focus on that positive, the medical report over looks the normal me, which is house bound and fighting constant depression and anxiety.

So, we went through my medication, she asked why I saw my psychiatrist every 4-6 weeks, why I had cut my self the previous week, asked if I could drive, focused heavily on the fact I said I took my son to school once or twice a week and visited my mother in law with my wife at the nursing home once a week, and suddenly she said okay I have everything I need. I - relieved to escape - left as quick as I could.

It is now 3 days after the medical, I constantly reflect, from the moment of waking, that I didn't say about: nightmares, headaches, my body reactions with shaking, twitching and my constant worry and sense of being overwhelmed and all consumed.

So now I have to wait for 3 weeks to see what the DWP thinks and as a depressive I can't stop thinking they will say I am fine and fit for work – the thought of which has brought on numerous relapses in the past.

What I really don't understand is why I have to fight so hard to access help from the primary and secondary care of the National Health Service in terms of therapy and the right medication, but the Government can throw loads of resources at doing all it can to make me feel so much worse and do everything it can to avoid giving me benefits.

I spend so much time worrying about money anyway, why would anyone want to try and survive on benefits, if they could work. (Up until 3 years ago I always worked, earned good money and paid my taxes)

So thanks Mr Cameron for making the past 3 weeks so hard for me, causing a relapse and creating a continued period of severe anxiety whilst I await the outcome of my medical. Perhaps more money spent on helping disabled people rather than victimising us might be a better use of public resources!

Please give mental health sufferers a break, perhaps even some help!



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