

# Stroke victim ‘told to take back-to-work test while still in hospital’

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An MP is demanding an investigation after a stroke victim claimed she was told she must undergo a back-to-work test – while in a hospital stroke unit.

Labour’s Iain Wright said the case was one of the most disgraceful he had heard from constituents on sickness benefits who have been told to undergo a work capability assessment (WCA).

Mr Wright said the woman, who did not wish to be identified, had come to him in great distress, blaming the actions of the private firm Maximus, which carries out the assessments.

He told *The Independent*: “I found this case both utterly shocking and completely disgusting.

“It demonstrates all too vividly how inhumane and uncivilised the Government’s welfare reform policy is.”

Mr Wright vowed to write to Work and Pensions Secretary Damian Green to demand to know whether such practice was allowed – and to get a “full apology to my constituent”.

The case is the latest in a very long line of controversies surrounding the WCA, which is undergone by sick and disabled people attempting to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

French firm Atos lost the contract after protests that it wrongly found sick people able to work, provided a poor service and inflicted huge delays, but Maximus, its replacement, has also been criticised.

Asked about back-to-work tests this week, Mr Green acknowledged “there are individual cases where it looks as though the system is not working”.

It is understood that decisions about whether a patient in hospital is entitled to ESA are normally made using paper-based assessments, rather than by interview.

A Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spokesman said: “In-patients are treated as having limited capability for work and are therefore entitled to ESA.

“It is extremely rare for a WCA to be carried out in a hospital and this would only occur if not enough evidence was provided to qualify a person for the higher rate of the benefit.”

Maximus said fewer than a dozen assessments were carried out in hospital each year – of around 50,000 carried out each month.

It also said that, in the vast majority of cases involving patients in hospital, it was able to collect enough information to write a report for the DWP without the need for an interview.

Mr Wright said that his constituent did not, in the end, undergo a WCA in the stroke unit, but only because Maximus backed down when her family protested.

The Stroke Association has highlighted how stroke victims believe the tests to be unfair, humiliating and degrading, with the assessors cutting benefits because they failed to properly understand the effects of their condition.

One told the Association: “If you are not going to soil yourself at your desk, then you are fit for work.”

Maximus did not provide a statement to *The Independent*, but did say fewer than a dozen assessments were carried out in hospital each year – of around 50,000 carried out each month.

It also said that, in the vast majority of cases involving patients in hospital, it was able to collect enough information to write a report for the DWP without the need for an interview.

