

3.12 Deputy S. Pitman of the Minister for Social Security regarding the number of claimants of income support and other benefits by people with M.E./Chronic Fatigue Syndrome:

Firstly, I would just like to apologise to the Minister because I put this in as a written question because I wanted more information and it was not my fault, it is the Greffe's fault, but they are usually pretty good. How many people with M.E. or chronic fatigue syndrome are in receipt of invalidity benefit? How many are on long-term invalidity allowance? How many are also receiving income support and how is the incapacity of a sufferer assessed?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley (The Minister for Social Security):

As at 31st May 2013 our records show a total of 34 individuals in receipt of invalidity benefits due to a diagnosis of M.E. or chronic fatigue syndrome. This benefit was withdrawn for new claimants in 2004 and replaced by long-term incapacity allowance. There were 39 claims under this benefit, giving total claims of 73. Breaking down the figures, 10 of the 34 invalidity benefit claimants and 10 of the 39 L.T.I. (Long-Term Incapacity) claimants were also receiving income support as at the end of May. Ongoing invalidity benefit claims are based on quarterly medical certificates from G.P.s (General Practitioners). The claimant can also be asked to attend a medical board organised by the department. The test for invalidity benefit is that the claimant is completely incapable of work. All long-term incapacity allowance claims are assessed through departmental medical boards and the L.T.I. assessment is based on the loss of faculty of the individual and is calculated on a percentage basis. Doctors and departmental staff have access to a variety of resources to help them assess the incapacity of the claimant. For example, the U.K. Department for Work and Pensions provides a comprehensive website and the department has internal guidelines giving additional information.

3.12.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Given my knowledge of the illness and also of how people are assessed on long-term incapacity allowance and also impairment and invalidity benefits both in the examination and also on the application forms - for instance, people are asked how far they can lift, how far they can move their legs, how far they can bend - does he not feel that this is inappropriate given the symptoms and the worst one, the fatigue? Would he agree to look at a document which I have found called the *Scottish Good Practice Statement* on M.E./C.F.S. (chronic fatigue syndrome), which rates people and has a list of all the symptoms and ranks each symptom with the sufferer?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

As I have said, the department use the best available resources to assess a claimant who has M.E. or chronic fatigue syndrome. In particular, we have guidelines on variable and fluctuating conditions, which would encompass the days, perhaps, when somebody suffering from M.E. is feeling worse rather than better. Therefore, the department are familiar with the condition and the need to assess their overall condition rather than take the way they may be feeling on a particular day, particularly if they are attending a medical board on that day.

3.12.2 Deputy S. Pitman:

Does the Minister not agree, as does the chairman of the G.P. Association, that far more education is needed on this subject for his relevant officers, G.P.s, relevant H.S.S.D. (Health and Social Services Department) professionals and, if so, would he support a visit from a specialist like Charles Stevenson, who I mentioned earlier, to share his knowledge with such professionals initiating the development of a cross-departmental policy to treating sufferers towards recovery and not just their individual symptoms?

Senator F. du H. Le Gresley:

I think the Deputy in a way has already posed that question to the Minister for Health and Social Services. Certainly, any attempt to widen people's knowledge about the condition would be welcome and if a guest speaker could be invited across I am sure that would be a very good thing to do.