

What HARC clients said about the medical assessments they are compulsory required to undergo for ESA / DLA / PIP.

Anna

I went to the work capability assessment and thank goodness I had an advocate with me because they just lied. Thank God HARC were there, and thank god I had an advocate. I was curled up in a ball shaking, and could hardly talk, and the advisor said that I didn't have any anxiety. Thank God the advocate was with me it meant I had a witness. Reading the report initially I thought they had made a mistake; that they had got me mixed up with someone else. That's how inaccurate it was. They didn't get my medicines right - the report was nonsense. The work capability assessment is wicked. Really wicked. They are putting people under so much pressure - they are causing so much stress and distress - it is just wrong.

Some days, I want to go to the sea and just walk in - HARC have kept me from doing that.

Mother whose son came to HARC for support (Hastings assessment)

Reading the assessment was like reading about someone else. It is very worrying that when people are poorly - we get all this extra stress. He was ready to commit suicide. He has 12 months to live (they gave him 18 months, 6 months ago). Sometimes the medical people that they employ seem to have no medical knowledge. The woman basically lied, over and over in the report. It is appalling - when people are really sick they need support, not this kind of treatment. It is really disgusting how they treat people.

Amy (St Leonards assessment)

My assessor lied in her report. I took a retired nurse with me - she came into the appointment with me. When we read the report it was nothing like the assessment. My friend was really shocked.

I walked from reception into the assessor's room and was very out of breath. The assessor kept saying we have to start or the computer will run out of time. I was too out of breath to answer - and my friend had to say 'she can't answer you until she has her breath back'. Eventually I was able to answer her and the assessment started. We got into the assessment and she said 'I'm not going to examine your lower limbs, you are obviously in a lot of pain.' The report came and said 'at no point did I show any signs of being out of breath'. And it said 'Angela refused to have her limbs examined - she said she was in too much pain'.

I asked them (DWP during a mandatory reconsideration) to talk to my friend to evidence my point of view and they didn't and came back repeating word for word what the assessor said. I had a letter from my physiotherapist saying exactly what I could and couldn't do, and two letters from my doctor - and they were all ignored.

Teresa

When I had an assessment I went in on my own. My daughter parked out the front. When I got the letter the lady said I walked in carrying a bag, which was a blatant lie, and she lied a few times. I knew from the minute I went in, it wasn't going to be good. She was really rude and hostile.

Robert (Hastings)

I had had a terrible time with the assessment people in the past. This time I asked for a tape to be made. That was a right palaver – but I had looked it up and had the right to that – so I insisted. When the report came back she was telling blatant lies which was confirmed on the tape. It was as though she had something personally against me. About a dozen different things that she has written in the report and signed were contradicted by the tape. When you listen to the tape – and then look at the report – they bear no relationships to each other. She wrote for example that I had parked somewhere in the town and undertaken a 5-10 minute walk – I had told her my friend dropped me right outside. Surely lying on an official report is illegal. Is there no accountability for these people?

I have a copy of the tape and the report if you need it.

I walked in to the tribunal – the clerk came out – it took longer for me to walk to the room to have the interview than it did for the tribunal to question me – they told me they were throwing the case out within 45 seconds, it was that blatant.

Penny (Hollington – Enterprise Centre)

My circumstances aren't going to change, so it's ridiculous that they keep pulling you in for assessments. I have chronic osteoporosis. You don't want to keep moaning on about how unwell you are and everything. I have had terrible depression – and the constant reassessments are crazy. Luckily now I don't have to be reassessed until 2021. This last one was fine but the time before was dreadful. I was in a wheelchair – the woman was really off. I felt like she took an instant dislike to me. It was almost as if she lied. She said a lot of things in the report that just weren't true. They don't seem to understand that when you are genuinely ill, these things are really hard. When you are a decent person and you tell them the truth and they twist it or make up stuff – you end up feeling rubbish. I worked from 15 – I would love to be working. I think it is appalling, they don't listen, and then when you tell them stuff they don't record it. It is really appalling. I was once asked in an assessment if I had considered having a gastric band fitted – I was really depressed and that was the last thing I wanted to hear. When you are sitting in that wheelchair and you get spoken to like that, you get so down. I don't want to go out any more. Life is hard enough, pain wise, mentally, you have to give up so much when you're disabled, there's loads of things you want to do – your brain wants to do it and your body lets you down. Then they lie about you and it just makes everything so much worse. I hardly go out these days, I am so agoraphobic, and these PIP people, I honestly feel like they have made things much worse. I had to go all the way to Ashford for an

appeal. I am so shocked. I was brought up to tell the truth. I just don't understand how they get away with it.

Nobody knows what is round the corner, and when your health goes, you need support, not all this stress. They should be encouraging you, not putting you down as if you are an ant on the floor they want to step on. They have no compassion. They make you feel inadequate. They have all the medical reports; they should have a better understanding of what people are going through. The DWP man at the tribunal when the panel were considering the decision threatened me. He said 'my suggestion to you is you keep your mouth shut and don't say any more or you could lose everything'. It is just disgusting.

James

Lady was saying I was alright with public transport etc, that I am fine – but I don't go out very much at all and hate public transport – I am very nervous on it. When I got the report – it didn't reflect the truth at all. My wife had the same, she needs a heart and lung transplant – and the lady said that she was completely fine. Only way she will be completely fine is if she has a heart and lung transplant. They ignore what is happening – and they lie in their reports.

Feel free to come back to me – we have our reports and can prove this if you need it.

Mandy (Lewes assessment)

She made her mind up before I went in the room. I suffer from anxiety – because I wasn't shaking and sweating she said I didn't suffer from anxiety. Lady said there was nothing wrong with me despite the fact she had evidence from my doctor to the contrary. There were inaccuracies in the report – she lied basically. I am currently appealing the decision.

Richard (Hastings)

The medical assessments saw me turned down for DLA. I came out with 0 points - then got 26 points on appeal. It makes no sense – how can you have osteoporosis and get 0 points. I was in pain so couldn't do exercises – he said that I had refused to comply, but I had told him I couldn't do it because the pain was really bad that day and he made it sound like I was just being difficult. The report wasn't accurate. I think they lie.

Melissa (on behalf of her child)

At no time during the visit did she (my daughter) have eye-to-eye contact with the man. They were told I cook her meals – and that if I didn't do that she wouldn't eat. I have to ring her to remind her to take her meds, get out of bed etc. On the bad days I can't get her to get out of bed.

She was holding onto me as she walked in – never gave eye contact, almost half asleep because she had taken her meds and they were making her drowsy.

The report said she was fine and fit for work. It was beyond a joke. What he wrote down doesn't reflect what they were told, or how she came across. They don't listen, they come to the conclusions that they want to; they don't understand the health issues people are dealing with.

We had to get letters from the social workers, the doctors, and me, to get her through this. They were trying to force her to apply for work, which she wasn't capable of, then they would have sanctioned her and taken her money away for not being able to do what we had told them she wouldn't be able to do from the start. It's crazy. They don't listen. They don't care. They used to have medics in the centre but they don't even have that any more. You can't get a face-to-face appointment with anyone in DWP – they don't keep proper records, and then they make dreadful decisions. The whole system is dreadful; they should bring back face-to-face appointments with DWP staff, not these businesses that know nothing. They should also listen to your doctor. How can they say we know more about your health than the people who are seeing us and supporting us with our health week in and week out? It makes no sense to me. I did have a good assessment once, they came to visit me that time; the lady came from Tunbridge Wells, that one was OK, she was nice.

Phillip

I have experienced an assessor lying during the assessment.

Angela

The assessments are so traumatic. To be honest, I haven't applied for PIP even though I think my health has now deteriorated so much I would get it – because I hate the idea of going through it. Last time I did it the assessor really guided me to say I was better than I was, and what she wrote didn't sound like me, what my doctor had said, or what Becky (HARC Staff) had written in the form. They want to make you seem less ill than you are.

Rose

The report didn't really reflect the conversation, they don't listen and the last person I went to lied on the form.

Claire (home assessment)

I didn't have any problems with the assessment. They were really nice and the report was fine. They came and visited me at home to do it.

Kelly (undertook assessment in Hastings)

They contradict themselves, they lie. The statement contradicted itself and said that I said or did things that I didn't. Because they can't see mental health – they assume it's not there. She was rude, I didn't feel comfortable at all there. When I read the statement back it said things that just were not true, for example she said I had taken my jumper off in the assessment without assistance. That wasn't true, my partner had to help me do that because I have trouble with my joints.

Jane (Hastings)

They (the assessors) are appalling – we thought they were ok and had listened, then the report came and we didn't know what they were talking about. What they sent me wasn't what we had said. I couldn't understand why the report bore no relation to the conversation we had had.

I lost my ESA – and I would have lost Pip too – they (HARC) got it all back.

Ben (Hastings)

She must have been having a bad day. She didn't look at anything I had given her. I was fit as fiddle according to her – because I could walk to the door, I was capable of work apparently. I had 18+ points, I came out with 0 points – and made a miraculous recovery apparently. I had to go through the whole appeal process. She didn't listen to anything I said when I was there, when she wrote the report she must have looked at my files so she listed my conditions, but I still got 0 points. On appeal – They gave me the same points I had when I went in and they gave me all my points back. She said that I did a ten-minute walk from Wellington square to the centre – but it wasn't true. I got a lift that dropped me out outside.

Lucy (St Leonards)

I have severe mental health from my childhood, I was abused by my Dad and a lot of other men. I also have EPDP, severe fibro myalgia, spinal stenosis and PTSD.

I haven't seen the report yet – so I can't comment on that. I have no idea what she put down, apart from bits and pieces on the back of the letter – she said I could travel confidently – she took 4 points off me for that. I am petrified of getting on a bus – she has no idea what it takes for me to do that – she just took my points away because I turned up on my own – they assumed I was fine. They didn't want to know how I felt on that journey. They force me to come out of my home, then penalised me because I did.

My first one in 2016 – I was crying in the assessment, they made me feel so bad. I was so distraught – it's so bad to do the assessment – I'd been sick on the bus in – she was there less than 25 minutes – then they turned me down that time – they didn't say I was tearful. Didn't listen, and then just made their own minds up. The whole thing is so frustrating – and it's not fair. They have all the information and just decide time and time again, not to believe you. They make my mental health so much worse. Because of how they make you feel, and being pulled out of my home to go to these appointments. If you don't go, you lose your benefits anyway. It takes months to recover from this basically.

Kate

I was on DLA for years, I had had 4 assessments, bone density tests etc and they all said, too sick to work.

Last one – quick chat, no real assessment, and on her say so it went out of the window. Because I could take myself to the toilet and feed myself - that was it.

When I got her report come through – it was nonsense. She asked a few questions and that was it. She basically said I was fine. Amazing, years of medicals, my doctor's opinion, what I told her, it all counted for nothing.

Derek (home assessment)

I had a home medical assessment. Went ok but I refused to do a couple things as I knew it would put me in agony. The woman was OK. They gave me the PIP after that.

Ron

The last time I went, I had a high number of points – at the review they gave me 0 points. HARC appealed, I got it back. Twice I have lost it and got it back. Reports were not accurate either time, but HARC luckily sorted it out for me.

Isabelle (client's mum) (assessment in Hollington)

When we had the report from the tribunal it said that the people doing the medical assessments were totally incompetent.

(My son) has problems with his bowels, he is badly incontinent, and he gets very anxious – he asked to go to the toilet – she showed him to the door. When he went to come back, he got lost. None of that was mentioned in the report. She put 0 points – all across the board – he got 23 points at tribunal.

I took some evidence - she said that he was capable of doing things he wasn't capable of doing. Because she got him to sign a piece of paper – which he did, she said that he was capable of managing his life and tasks.

I told her about his tremors – she just ignored that – didn't get into the report. I told her he went and sat on the bench, on the way to the centre. I told her he struggled to get into the interview. And had had a seizure the night before which I am sure was brought on by the stress of the assessment, she didn't mention any of that either.

Janet (mum of client - undertook assessment in Ashford – lives in Hastings)

Man was very pleasant, seemed to understand things and had lots of sympathy. When the report came back it was like reading about a different person. (my son) had been very anxious – which makes him high (he is a diabetic) – I had to prompt him three times to take his insulin during the assessment. (I have his blood readings come straight to my phone from a monitor). The man sat there and watched me do that, then wrote that he manages his own medication. (My son) didn't talk; they said he was very sociable. They write about him walking in as if he did that every day – but when is hypo he can't walk, you tell

them that – they don't put it in the report. They don't believe what you tell them, they just look at him and say he is ok. They lost points, when he came out he had 0 points. But should have had points that had gone missing. When we got to tribunal, they gave him 20 points in total.

I was reading the report thinking this is just not what we said.

What is really hard is that you are living with the implications of your child's serious health concerns every day, and they just trivialise it. Make it sound like it is no big issue, when it's a massive deal for the people affected by it. That's really hard. It made me really down, and my son really down, that they could see him, with all those problems, and conclude he is perfectly fine.

They (HARC) communicated really well. They made a massive difference – had I had to wait a year to go through the process without support – I would have had a nervous breakdown. They made such a difference, they reassured me when I felt totally alone. I would have definitely had a terrible patch in my depression without them – as would my husband.

Mary (undertook assessment in Tunbridge Wells – lives in Hastings)

My husband took me there because I cannot get around on my own. I tried really hard to show that even though I have severe disabilities, I am part of an honest hardworking family, doing my best to stay positive and do what I can.

I told her in detail what happens every day against all descriptors.

She ignored everything I had said. She refused to look at my medical evidence, and then reported none of my medical conditions were backed up. Even though I walked along the hallway backed up by the wall, for less than 10 metres, she said I can walk, I have no impairment to my walking. It felt like a witch-hunt. Like they were looking at you with no regard for what you find difficult. I got 0 points. I shouldn't have gone, the answer was no before I went in. The report was dishonest – everything was twisted. They even copied and pasted from someone else's assessment and called me a he in a couple of places.

Jason (undertook assessment in St Leonards)

If I hadn't had someone to take me, I wouldn't have gone, it was quite traumatic, I was anxious before I went, I couldn't have got there on my own, it was very stressful to get there, I found it quite stressful. I got upset and cried whilst I was there. The way they speak to you – you feel like you're being tested. I don't want to be ill, I don't want this.

Some of the questions are not relevant – can I walk from here to here, yes I can, am I in pain, yes I am, can I do a full time job, no I couldn't.

Some days I feel like I have literally been run over – it's like they're not listening. I can't see anyone in their right mind who would want to pretend to be sick. I took all the medical evidence, my diagnosis from the hospital, my medical records etc. – when I got the report, it didn't sound like that had been taken into account.

They rang me initially saying they wanted me to go to Tonbridge the next day. I said no. Tonbridge was too far, I couldn't manage that. They had told me I would have to wait 8 weeks because I wouldn't go to Tonbridge. I couldn't have done that; I would have been panicking in the car. Within a week I got a letter saying I could go to St Leonards. I felt they lied to me, and worried me, because they were trying to pressurise me to go to Tonbridge.

Sue (Hastings assessment)

It was fine, lady was very nice. I have now had the report. It was fine.

Sarah (Hollington assessment)

They tried to get me to go to Ashford for this, but I knew they had a centre in St Leonards and put my foot down so they let me go there in the end. I went in on my mobility scooter – and they said I had walked in which was just blatantly untrue. She got me very uptight - I got frustrated with how she was asking things, she gave me no time to think, she wouldn't let my husband help me even though I have problems with my memory. I couldn't believe her report – it wasn't describing me, the person she was describing was a complete stranger. She said I could wash and dress myself, that's not true; I can't get my arms round my back. I had told her that I couldn't do these things. Really, the report was a pack of lies.

Mum of client (17 years old boy) (assessment done in Eastbourne)

I will never forgive them for what they did to my son. They demeaned all the things he lives with, fights through, and struggles with every day. He has an illness that means he can't grip. He's been in A&E three times recently, because he is 17 and wants to be independent, he tries to cook, his hand slips and he gets cut on knives. Three times that's happened. We told her that as an example. She said he had no problems gripping. It's cruel, they made him feel like he is a cheat, like he is trying it on. He was so depressed when he came out, then when we got the report, it was even worse. Not being believed is horrible. It really affected his mental health; he was depressed for about six months after that.