Inter observer variability of ill health retirement advice in mental health cases within a large pension scheme

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To study the variability of outcomes in mental health ill health retirement cases within the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) and to investigate: a) the effect the age of applicants and b) medical advisers working together, have on the variability of advice.

Method: 40 detailed case histories randomly selected from a hundred consecutive cases, stratified for age were forwarded to eight advisers based in Coventry and twelve advisers based in regions outside Coventry (considered as a group). Participants were asked to accept or reject the applications based on the medical information provided or to indicate if a face to face assessment is required. In Classic scheme cases accepted for ill health retirement, participants were asked to indicate whether the upper or lower tier was applicable if the Classic Plus / Premium scheme rules applied.

Results: All eight Coventry based advisers and eight advisers from regions outside Coventry responded. The overall kappa statistic for the 16 advisers in all case histories is 0.3803 indicating fair agreement. The overall kappa statistic for the 16 advisers in the older age group of applicants is 0.3867 and the younger age group of applicants is 0.2044. The difference is statistically significant (p=0.007). The difference in kappa statistic for Coventry based advisers assessing cases in both age groups did not reach statistical significance (p=0.24) but did for advisers based outside Coventry (p=0.003). Apart from outcomes in the younger age group of applicants, the difference in kappa statistic between the two groups of advisers did not reach statistical significance.

Conclusion: The overall consistency in mental health ill health retirement outcomes can be further improved. Young age in applicants is associated with increased variability in mental health ill health retirement outcomes. There is no significant benefit measurable when advisers work together in a geographical location.

Key words: Variability, ill health retirement, mental health.