Transforming a service that delivers to around 2.7 million Incapacity Benefit claimants was a major undertaking, and one that required an innovative solution. Atos Origin worked with the Department for Work and Pensions to develop LiMA, an IT-enabled Evidence Based Medicine system, to streamline processes, deliver greater value for money and ensure the highest standards in medical reporting.
Background
The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for the Government’s welfare reform programme. Employing approximately 120,000 people, one of its key functions is to decide state benefit claims. Service delivery is something upon which the DWP is continually striving to improve, measured by a number of key performance criteria, which include:

- Speed of service, ensuring that claimants are seen and responded to promptly
- Consistency, delivering accurate decision-making
- Value for money, enabling services to be delivered at the optimum cost and service level
- Modernisation, for example, replacing paper-based systems with electronic mechanisms for delivering completed assessment reports.

Working with the DWP to transform a service that delivers to around 2.7 million Incapacity Benefit claimants alone was a major undertaking, and one that required an innovative solution. In order to achieve its goals, the DWP chose the experience and financial investment of the private sector, outsourcing the provision of medical assessments for benefit claims.

Our solution
When the DWP outsourced its medical assessment contract to Atos Origin in 1998, it was the largest contract ever awarded in Europe. Since then, it has also become one of the most innovative. Combining leading medical practice with the latest technology, Atos Origin created a solution that simultaneously addressed all the key performance criteria set by the DWP.

An integral part of the programme was the introduction of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), a concept that links current medical research with professional best practice to underpin the medical assessment process. This demanded the development and maintenance of a medical evidence knowledge base covering a wide range of common conditions, which was then made available to assessing doctors.

Developing EBM for disability assessment was a major undertaking, involving clinicians from both Atos Origin and the DWP working together to research the four main areas of incapacity: musculoskeletal, cardio-vascular, respiratory and mental health. Through distillation and critical appraisal of the best evidence from clinical journals, a set of medical protocols was created. The medical profession and the DWP’s senior medical advisors then ratified these best practice protocols. The protocols formed a solid framework, from which training and reference materials were created to support doctors in improving consistency.

As work progressed, Atos Origin was already contemplating the next step – how to replace the paper-based delivery mechanism for assessments. In 2001, a decision was taken to use an IT-based system to improve legibility, consistency and accuracy of the medical reports submitted by Atos Origin to the DWP.

Clinicians and IT experts from Atos Origin worked together to develop a groundbreaking, web-based EBM system called LiMA (Logic Integrated Medical Assessment). Using medical protocols to underpin its logic, LiMA provides doctors with a consistent framework, based on best practice, to accurately record clinical findings. It is easy to use, employing a secure web-based application and a simple ‘point and click’ interface. Once users have entered all the relevant information, LiMA provides them with choices that are consistent with the available evidence, while allowing them to remain in control of all medical decisions and judgements. Complex phrases can be quickly created, enabling the production of an accurate and fully justified medical report, which is then sent direct to the DWP.

Business benefits
Over 700 doctors regularly use LiMA, which has been installed in over 100 medical examination centres across the UK. Benefits are clear:

- Reports are evidence-based, clearly presented, legible and fully justified
- By checking reports against medical standards, there is an increased level of consistency
- A detailed audit trail monitors how the report and the advice it contains were produced
LiMA ensures that medical jargon can be reviewed and removed, simplifying the task for people without medical training, such as JobCentre Plus decision makers.

The successful implementation of this groundbreaking integration of clinical research and technology was a significant factor in Atos Origin being awarded the DWP medical assessment contract for a further seven years, when it went out for re-tender in 2005.

Building on success
LiMA’s success as a standard IT platform for delivering Incapacity Benefit assessments has led to it being extended to three other disability related benefits – Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries and War Pensions. It is also being developed to support new roles created for Health Care Professionals, as they become an integral part of the process of disability assessment.

The ongoing development and implementation of LiMA requires a multitude of skills in clinical research, IT development, training and infrastructure deployment, IT integration, project management and above all, change management. Atos Origin and the DWP work in partnership to provide these skills and achieve ongoing success.

For more information on Atos Origin Medical Services, visit www.atosorigin.co.uk/medicalservices

“...All doctors carrying out personal capability assessments on behalf of the DWP have been trained in the EBM protocols, bringing them up-to-date and improving and enhancing the quality of their work. Those who have been trained on LiMA believe that they are able to do a more professional job, giving more consistent and robustly justifiable medical advice. Job Centre Plus staff have also welcomed LiMA because they now receive a printed, more detailed report which will influence the quality of their decision making.”

Dr Moira Henderson, Principal Medical Advisor, Department for Work and Pensions
About Atos Origin Medical Services

Atos Origin Medical Services is a leading UK provider of occupational health, primary care, capability assessment and diagnostic services. We make a positive difference to the health and wellbeing of some of the UK’s largest organisations, delivering services that benefit more than two million people each year.

Through the provision of occupational health, counselling and screening services, Atos Origin Medical Services enables employers to pro-actively promote employee wellbeing, helping to reduce sickness absence and ensure maximum workforce productivity.

We lead the market in the field of capability assessment, with our services enabling decisions to be made on entitlement to social security benefits, return to work support programmes and compensation claims.

Atos Origin Medical Services also delivers services on behalf of the NHS in the fields of primary care and diagnostics, being the first organisation in the UK to establish and run an independently operated NHS Walk-in Centre.

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