

Disability Grants

People living in rural areas have higher levels of disability than their urban compatriots. They also have one of the highest rates of unemployment. This means that many families rely on a monthly disability grant (DG) as their sole source of income. Unfortunately, it also means that many people have come to see DGs as a form of income support grant.

Systems for accessing DGs will differ around the country. We are happy to share our system (contact us), but the following points of relevance and are worth being aware of.

1. There are many patients who legitimately qualify for DGs who are not getting them. Reasons for this include the fact that they do not have an Identity Document, that they do not know how to apply, or that the grant has recently been stopped (the reasons for which are often unclear).
2. Many patients with chronic illnesses, for example hypertension or diabetes, hope to get a grant despite the fact that their illnesses are well controlled on medication and therefore do not qualify as disabled according to criteria determined by the Department of Social Services. Many patients do not understand this.
3. In extreme cases some patients have actually refused treatment for their condition as they prefer to remain unwell and hopefully qualify for a grant, rather than “risk” getting better!
4. Patients with dire financial needs are often inappropriately referred to hospital for DGs by clinics and social workers who also mistake DGs for Income Support Grants.
5. Some patients qualify for Temporary DGs (for example, patients with tuberculosis). When they get better, however, the grant is stopped as they no longer qualify. Many do not understand this either.
6. Some patients have in the past been recommended for DGs by unscrupulous doctors. When these DGs are stopped, it is impossible to honestly recommend that they be recommenced.

We try to take the following into account as we play our part in helping people access this social service:

1. Patients who qualify for DGs are assisted in obtaining them as timeously as possible.
2. Patients who do not qualify are educated about the reasons they do not and encouraged to spare the expense of visits to Social Services and the hospital, while at the same time assisting them to access assistance from SASSA.
3. Acutely ill patients and their care should not be compromised by attending to DG applicants.

These objectives are difficult to balance and we recognise that given numbers of patients and doctors it will be difficult to keep everyone happy all of the time.

At Zithulele, we run a MDT DG Assessment clinic on a Friday in OPD. Only MDT team members can book patients for this clinic. We found previously that the vast majority of patients coming for assessment were patients with chronic illnesses, usually well controlled, who did NOT qualify for grants. As a result, we used to have a clinic booked up over four months in advance – making it difficult for people who genuinely qualify for grants to get seen and limiting the chance for people to get temporary grants. The waiting time is now 1-3 weeks.

Further points regarding patients with disabilities:

1. All patients who have disabilities are also offered the services of our Occupational Therapists, who specialise in assisting people with disabilities to be more functional in their everyday lives. They also assist with things like ordering wheelchairs for those who need them.
2. Patients with other social problems are referred to the hospital's Social Worker.

- Present staff and transport limitations dramatically reduce our ability to assist patients who are physically unable to get to hospital. When patients are completely unable to get to hospital, such cases should be brought to our attention and will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Which Grant Is Which?

Disability Grant	Grant paid to adults (> 18yr) who are unable to seek work due to a medical condition or disability. May be temporary or permanent
Care Dependency Grant	Grant paid to adult carer of a child (< 18yr) who require greater than normal amounts of care due to a medical condition or disability
Grant in Aid	Grant paid in addition to an adult who requires the full time help of another adult to care for themselves. Can be paid to recipients of DG or old age pension
Foster Grant	Grant paid to an adult who has become the legal foster parent of a child
Child Support Grant	Grant paid to the parent (usually mother) of a child < 18yrs

Of course, hardest of all is trying to work out what combination of limitations actually crosses the threshold for a disability grant. Typically, you need to be “40% impaired” to qualify as disabled, though rural circumstances are considered. The best guide of which we are aware, is the *Guidelines for the Medical Assessment of Disability for Social Assistance Purposes*. We have put a copy on our [website](#) for easy access.