



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Research Paper

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# Free Hospital Parking: Opportunities and challenges

**NIAR 28-22**

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the practicalities of implementing free parking at hospital sites in Northern Ireland including how other regions in the UK have introduced this policy and what, if any, challenges and opportunities have arisen.

**Paper 28/22**

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# 1 Why introduce free parking?

Over the last decade several groups including trade unions, charities such as the Macmillan Cancer Support and advocacy groups like the Patients Association have all campaigned for free or significantly reduced fees at hospital car parks.<sup>1</sup> The Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee recently stated that:

*'Car parking charges are essentially a tax on the sick, one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. We must challenge this at all levels and ask are patients making decisions on whether they can attend appointments based on if they can afford the car parking fees. The Department of Health states they want to tackle health inequalities, and this is one way in which they could help those that are struggling financially and living in poverty.'*<sup>2</sup>

The following section explores some of the most common arguments put forward for the abolition of hospital parking fees.

## 1.1 Impact of costs on relatives and carers

Receiving medical treatment is often a physically and emotionally challenging experience, both for the person receiving treatment and those caring for and supporting them. The cost of paying for parking at hospitals can present issues for patients receiving ongoing treatment which requires regular attendance at hospital and for families visiting critically ill patients for long periods of time.

Research conducted by Health Watch UK to examine people's experience of travelling to and from health services identified that one of the most frequent issues raised is the availability and cost of parking. Respondents find it stressful gauging how long they need to buy a parking ticket for. They also worry about the risk of fines if their appointment runs over, or missing their appointment while trying to put more money in the meter.<sup>3</sup>

Carers UK suggests that hospital car parking charges place an unfair financial burden on those caring for disabled, elderly, or ill relatives or friends. Many carers often have to visit hospital for routine appointments, or for unplanned stays for the person they care for. This means that they can face significant car parking charges over the course of a year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Car Parking Charges : No Charges in our NHS. Unison Website. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/motions/2021/conference-type/car-parking-charges-no-charges-in-our-nhs/> **and** Position statement on car parking charges at hospitals, The Patients Association <https://www.patients-association.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3e82b1e5-cc55-407d-8bbc-c7d63c3d0525> **and** Macmillan, Out of order: The hidden cost of hospital car parking, July 2013, p3 [https://web.archive.org/web/20200501075836/https://www.macmillan.org.uk/images/hospital-parking-charges-report-2013\\_tcm9-323814.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20200501075836/https://www.macmillan.org.uk/images/hospital-parking-charges-report-2013_tcm9-323814.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> NIC-ICTU Health unions car parking charges response, January 27, 2022. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ictuni.org/publications/nic-ictu-health-unions-car-parking-charges-response>

<sup>3</sup> Health Watch (2019) There and back. What people tell us about their experiences of travelling to and from NHS services <https://web.archive.org/web/20200505081840/https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/sites/healthwatch.co.uk/files/20191016%20People%27s%20Exper1111iences%20of%20patient%20transport%20Formatted%20final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Hospital Car Parking. Park the Charges. Carers UK Website. [Online] available at: <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/hospital-car-parking>

When people take on a caring role they often face a steep drop in income, for example if they have had to leave work, or reduce their hours, to care. This loss in income is also often coupled with a steep rise in household expenditure, as a result of the additional costs of caring. This can include things like additional travel and parking costs, as they support the person to attend medical appointments, or to provide care during stays in hospital. The Carers Association suggest that eliminating car parking charges for this group would bring a measure of financial relief.<sup>5</sup>

The findings of a survey carried out by the charities Bliss and Tiny Life with 192 parents of premature babies in hospital for extended periods suggest that paying for parking is an additional cost that parents face along with other costs associated with travel (mileage, taxis), accommodation, food and childcare. While hospitals who were also invited to take part in the survey stated that they did provide free parking for parents with premature babies, many parents were not made aware of free parking, paying an extra £37 a week as a result.<sup>6</sup>

Bliss and Tiny Life have called upon the Government to provide “free parking, help with travel and meal costs, and free overnight accommodation” for affected parents.

## 1.2 Recognition of staff

A recently published paper by the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, prepared to support the Health Committee’s Scrutiny of the 2021 Private Members Hospital Parking Charges Bill, discusses the costs incurred by staff when parking at hospitals sites in Northern Ireland in detail.<sup>7</sup>

The British Medical Association (BMA) stated that the removal of parking charges across the UK at the beginning of the pandemic was a move warmly welcomed by healthcare staff. The BMA further stated that the removal of hospital charges on a permanent basis would be a morale booster for staff.<sup>8</sup>

The issues of recruitment and retention relating to medical staff are well known, it is suggested that removing parking charges could assist with staff feeling more valued.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.3 Support for staff and patients in rural areas

Unsurprisingly, for people living in rural areas, getting to hospital appointments is a greater problem than those living in urban communities. Not only are journeys longer, they are also often more inconvenient because people have to take indirect routes. Public transport is often limited and for staff working at night or shifts outside of core hours it is often impossible

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<sup>5</sup> Hospital Car Parking. Park the Charges. Carers UK Website. [Online] available at: <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/hospital-car-parking>

<sup>6</sup> Bliss and Tiny Life (2014) It’s not a game: the very real costs of having a premature or sick baby [Online] Available at: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/files.bliss.org.uk/images/Bliss-not-a-game-Northern-Ireland.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Black, LA (2021) Hospital Parking Charges Bill. Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/raise-bill-paper---hospital-parking-charges-bill.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> British Medical Association (2021) Hospital Parking Charges Bill –call for evidence. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/bma.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Cited directly above

to use public transport.<sup>10</sup> The cost of mileage and maintenance of cars for those travelling from rural areas is already a significant cost before adding in the cost of parking. Removing parking fees would reduce some of the financial burden for rural staff, patients and visitors.<sup>11</sup>

The Rural Community Network have also highlighted that the higher level of absolute poverty amongst rural pensioners, as well as the difficulty of accessing public transport and the reality that older people are more likely to require hospital treatment more regularly as they age, provide further compelling reasons to abolish hospital car parking charges.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Why charge for parking at hospitals?

The costs involved in maintaining hospital car parks, coupled with the demand for spaces and the urgent need to reduce vehicle emissions means that parking needs to be managed effectively. The British Parking Association (BPA) concluded that the most effective way to do this is to charge. This recognises the:

- Value of a car parking space;
- Needs of other users of the facility;
- Impact of car emissions on the environment; and
- Need to maintain and improve car parks by reinvesting income.<sup>13</sup>

The BPA further argues that good quality, well designed and properly maintained parking provision is vital to the success of hospitals and healthcare facilities and charging for parking needs to be seen in the context of delivering a better, fairer and greener service to users and staff. It is suggested that not charging for parking can have several consequences, some of which are set out below.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1 Healthcare budgets will be used to pay for parking facilities

Income from parking charges pays for maintenance (lighting, security, resurfacing), parking enforcement, secure bike storage and showers, as well as contributing towards patient care.

The Northern Ireland Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, stated that in 2018-2019, hospital car parks generated £7.5m from charges, but that the cost of operating the car parks was £8.8m - a deficit of £1.3m. As costs were not fully recovered, no surplus monies were

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<sup>10</sup> Hospital Parking Charges Bill: Second Stage Private Members' Business – in the Northern Ireland Assembly, 22nd November 2021. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2021-11-22.7.1> and NHS Confederation (2010) Fair for all, not free-for-all Principles for sustainable hospital car parking [https://www.nhsconfed.org/sites/default/files/media/fair-for-all-hospital-car-parking\\_0.pdf](https://www.nhsconfed.org/sites/default/files/media/fair-for-all-hospital-car-parking_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Cited direct above

<sup>12</sup> Rural Community Network (2022) Rural Community Network Response to the Hospital Parking Charges Bill [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/committees/2017-2022/health/primary-legislation/hospital-parking-charges/written-submissions/rural-community-network-response-to-the-hospital-parking-charges-bill.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Hospital Parking British Parking Association Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.britishparking-media.co.uk/campaigns/hospital-parking-1>

<sup>14</sup> Cited directly above



generated for reinvestment in patient services. Instead, the deficit of £1.3m was charged to the various HSC Trusts.<sup>15</sup>

The Minister further stated:

*'If charging were to stop, the revenue raised to meet the cost of the provision and maintenance of car parking would similarly cease, ultimately reducing the amount of money I would have available to fund patient care, I therefore have no plans to review my Department's policy on car parking charges at this time'.<sup>16</sup>*

The Belfast Trust recently highlighted that funding from income derived from parking pays for over 100 free off-site staff parking spaces at Dundonald Omniplex and also provides a free to use staff shuttle bus to and from work to the car park. If the income stream from parking is lost, this may lead to the closure of free off-site locations and potentially inhibit the expansion of travel planning initiatives, which could increase congestion within the Trust's local communities.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Staff who travel by public transport are financially penalised

Commentators have suggested that free hospital parking subsidises car owners and leaves others no choice but to pay the alternative travel costs such as train and bus fares<sup>18</sup>.

A recent opinion piece published in the British Medical Journal suggests that low-income hospital staff are experiencing what is known as 'forced car ownership' (FCO).<sup>19</sup> The notion of FCO, born out of transport research on UK rural areas, is used to define households who own cars, despite limited economic resources.<sup>20</sup>

Research shows that for low income groups, the costs of owning, maintaining, and running a car often results in deprivation in other areas of their lives—such as fuel poverty, food poverty, and participation in social activities.<sup>21</sup> Considering the existing financial precarities among low income health professionals, forced car ownership is an additional financial burden which subsidised, or even free parking is unlikely to resolve.

The same applies to workers and visitors to the hospital who cannot drive for reasons of health or disability or for those who cannot afford a car.<sup>22</sup> Rather than simply focusing on

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<sup>15</sup> <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=29337>

<sup>16</sup> <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=29337>

<sup>17</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> British Medical Journal (2020) Caring for those who care—free parking is not it. British Medical Journal [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/12/08/caring-for-those-who-care-free-parking-is-not-it/>

<sup>19</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>20</sup> Mattioli, G (2017) 'Forced Car Ownership' in the UK and Germany: Socio-Spatial Patterns and Potential Economic Stress Impacts. *Social Inclusion*, 5 (4). pp. 147-160

<sup>21</sup> Lucas, K, Mattioli, G, Verlinghieri, E and Guzman, Alvero (2016) Transport poverty and its adverse social consequences Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers Transport 169 December Issue TR6 Pages 353–365

<sup>22</sup> British Medical Journal (2020) Caring for those who care—free parking is not it. British Medical Journal [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/12/08/caring-for-those-who-care-free-parking-is-not-it/>

free parking, policy directives on improved sustainable public transport and active travel options are more likely to be of benefit to this group while also contributing to wider environmental and public health benefits.<sup>23</sup>

The Belfast Health Trust highlights that free car parking could create inequality between staff. If the staff who are able to bring their car to work do not have to pay for the use of the car park, they will effectively have their travel subsidised by the Trust. This subsidy is not made available to staff travelling to work by other means.<sup>24</sup>

*'While the Trust has worked with Translink to optimise the savings available to staff, the Trust could not consider diverting resources from patient care to subsidise staff public transport travel. If car parking charges for staff were abolished, and staff had access to free car parking, the Trust would effectively be using patient funds to subsidise travel costs for some staff and not others and the benefit would not be targeted towards those who are most financially disadvantaged.'*<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3 Undermines sustainability policies

Commentators have highlighted that the objections to the cost of hospital car parking don't account for the environmental consequences of private vehicle commuting and its wider public health implications. Car and taxi traffic on UK roads are growing annually, and road transport contributes one fifth of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK.<sup>26</sup> Air pollution, resulting in part from those emissions, has been identified as the biggest environmental health risk across Europe, with attributable deaths including heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, and lung cancer.<sup>27</sup> For example, UK research suggests an association between traffic related air pollution and the number of adult cardiovascular and paediatric respiratory hospital admissions.<sup>28</sup>

Fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) is the air pollutant driving these significant health problems and associated premature mortality.<sup>29</sup> A report by the British Lung Foundation found that many UK hospitals are in areas which exceed safe and legal limits of PM<sub>2.5</sub>.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>24</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>26</sup> Road transport and air emissions Office for National Statistics Website: [Online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/roadtransportandairemissions/2019-09-16#:~:text=In%202017%2C%20GHG%20emissions%20from,increasingly%20stringent%20exhaust%20emission%20limits.>

<sup>27</sup> Air pollution: how it affects our health <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/health-impacts-of-air-pollution>

<sup>28</sup> Amoli E, Atkinson RW, Analitis A, Fuller GW, Green DC, Mudway I, Anderson HR, Kelly FJ. (2016) Associations of short-term exposure to traffic-related air pollution with cardiovascular and respiratory hospital admissions in London, UK. *Occup Environ Med.* 73(5):300-7

<sup>29</sup> Air pollution: how it affects our health European Environment Agency [Online] Available at:

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/health-impacts-of-air-pollution#:~:text=Air%20pollution%20is%20a%20major,lung%20diseases%20and%20lung%20cancer.>

<sup>30</sup> Toxic Air at the door of the NHS, 2019, British Lung Foundation Website <https://www.blf.org.uk/take-action/campaign/nhs-toxic-air-report>

A 2020 study of major urban areas in the UK found that PM<sub>2.5</sub> was linked to 178 deaths in Belfast in just one year, or 4.1% of all adult deaths. While the number of deaths is lower than in some other UK capitals, Belfast is the second biggest emitter of PM<sub>2.5</sub> per head in the UK, after Swansea.<sup>31</sup> This underlines the urgency of reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that transport contributes to the environment.

The Northern Ireland Assembly signed up to 'New Decade New Approach' in January 2020 which stated the "Executive will introduce legislation and targets for reducing carbon emissions in line with the Paris Climate Change Accord". On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 the Executive declared a "Climate Emergency". A Climate Change Bill is currently going through the NI Assembly.<sup>32</sup>

It is suggested that free parking undermines Trusts' work to increase sustainable travel and support efforts to reduce emissions. Those who argue against free parking suggest that policy makers should focus on how to make sustainable forms of travel feasible for all hospital workers.<sup>33</sup>

### 3 Free hospital parking in Scotland has presented challenges

In September 2008, the Scottish Government abolished car park charges at NHS hospitals. However, this decision did not extend to three hospitals operating under private finance initiative (PFI) schemes. In 2021, the Scottish government purchased the three carparks at PFI sites at a cost of £35 million meaning that staff, patients and visitors will no longer be required to pay for parking at any hospital in Scotland.<sup>34</sup>

The Scottish Government has said that it is the responsibility of NHS boards to effectively manage their hospital car parking spaces and the Scottish Government Circular CEL 1 (2008) sets out guidance on hospital access and parking. It requires NHS boards to ensure hospitals have a "reasonable" allocation of spaces for patients, carers and staff and to offer a "package of practical measures" to improve accessibility and influence transport to hospital sites. This includes developing travel plans in partnership with local authorities and regional transport partnerships.<sup>35</sup>

The Scottish Government in 2015 said removing most car parking charges at NHS hospitals had saved patients and NHS staff £25 million over the previous 7 years.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the

<sup>31</sup>Enenkel, K, Quinio and Swinney, P (2020) Cities Outlook 2020. Holding our breath. Centre for Cities [Online] Available at: <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Cities-Outlook-2020.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Committee for Health Call for Evidence -Hospital Parking Charges Bill Response by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/south-eastern-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Cited directly above.

<sup>34</sup> Hospital parking charges, WiredGov Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/0/CCC871E90D53578F802574B80041C055?OpenDocument> and Hospital PFI car parks in Glasgow and Dundee bought out, Scottish Government Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/hospital-pfi-car-parks-in-glasgow-and-dundee-bought-out/>

<sup>35</sup> Revised Guidance On Hospital Car Park Charging, The Scottish Government CEL 1 (2008) 18 January 2008 [Online] Available at: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=Scottish+Government+Circular+CEL+1+%282008%29+sets+out+guidance+on+hospital+access+and+parking>

<sup>36</sup> Loft, P and Parkin, E (2021) Loft, P and Parkin, E (2021) NHS hospital car parking policies in the UK, Briefing Paper Number

Scottish Government reported that it had incurred a cost of approximately £5.596 million to allow free parking for staff, patients and visitors at the three PFI hospitals during the period of April 2020 - March 2021.<sup>37</sup>

The reported figures indicate that free parking at hospitals in Scotland provides significant savings for NHS trusts, staff, patients and visitors. However, there have been numerous media reports demonstrating that the potential issues identified with free parking have been borne out at several hospital sites.

Demand for car parking spaces at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh in Scotland significantly exceeds supply. NHS Lothian, the Health Board who are responsible for the hospital site, indicate that parking has become more difficult since parking fees were removed. Jim Crombie, Deputy Chief Executive of NHS Lothian stated that the site was becoming 'seriously congested, posing a danger to staff, patients and visitors' due to the sheer number of cars accessing the site every day. In particular, difficulty with ambulances getting through the site were highlighted.<sup>38</sup>

As a result, in January 2022, staff car parking permits, which had been abolished following the removal of parking charges, were reintroduced to try and manage the emerging difficulties.<sup>39</sup>

The decision to re-introduce the permits, which are issued on a points-based system, awarded according to factors such as travel time and medical conditions, has caused significant controversy.<sup>40</sup> NHS Lothian highlighted that there are a number of alternative options in place for those staff who do not have a pass including a designated park and ride five miles from the hospital which is served by a shuttle bus.<sup>41</sup>

However, staff highlighted that the majority of parking spaces were being taken by administrative non-clinical staff working regular hours rather than shift staff who were more in need of parking space for safety reasons such as leaving the hospital late at night. Furthermore, shuttle buses to the park and ride ended too early for night shift workers and there were concerns around the safety of the park and ride area at night.<sup>42</sup>

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8912 [Online] Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8912/CBP-8912.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Swanson, I (2020) Scottish Government foos £1m bill for free parking at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary after private company refuses to waive charges. Evening Edinburgh News Website. [Online] Available at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200429144048/https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/scottish-government-foos-ps1m-bill-free-parking-edinburgh-royal-infirmary-after-private-company-refuses-waive-charges-2521181>

<sup>38</sup> Young, I (2022) Edinburgh Royal Infirmary announce changes after controversy over parking scheme. Edinburgh Live News Website <https://www.edinburghlive.co.uk/news/edinburgh-news/edinburgh-royal-infirmary-announce-changes-22965591>

<sup>39</sup> Brown, A (2022) Parking rules change for Edinburgh hospital staff. BBC News Website. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-60234607>

<sup>40</sup> Young, I (2022) Edinburgh Royal Infirmary staff furious as free parking taken away by bosses (2022) <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/edinburgh-royal-infirmary-staff-furious-25925239>

<sup>41</sup> Young, I (2022) Edinburgh Royal Infirmary announce changes after controversy over parking scheme. Edinburgh Live News Website <https://www.edinburghlive.co.uk/news/edinburgh-news/edinburgh-royal-infirmary-announce-changes-22965591>

<sup>42</sup> Brown, A (2022) Edinburgh hospital staff say new car parking scheme is 'unsafe'. BBC News Website. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-60171192>

In response to concerns, the Trust added additional shuttle rides later in the evening and re-introduced car park access for all staff arriving on site from 11.30am onwards. This change is being introduced on a trial basis to understand the impact that it will have on capacity and congestion.<sup>43</sup>

Ninewells hospital located in Dundee, Scotland, reports that demand for parking spaces from staff, patient and visitor users has significantly increased since the abolition of parking charges. This is despite the hospital being well served by public transport.<sup>44</sup> Patients have report difficulties in accessing parking spaces resulting in them being late for, or missing appointments. Commentators have highlighted that this is particularly concerning given that the NHS Tayside Health Board, who are responsible for the hospital site, reported that missed appointments at the Ninewells hospital cost £5,716,932 in 2019.<sup>45</sup>

As a result, a number of measures have been introduced at the hospital site to assist with the flow of parking including dedicated short-stay car parks available on site for patients and visitors only. The spaces are located closer to the hospital and require users to pick up a free collect and display ticket. The shorter parking times in these car parks support a higher turnaround of patients using them. Long-stay car parks are also available for staff, patients and visitors to use. In addition, staff who have a permit can use dedicated staff permit holder car parks. They are also encouraging staff and the public to consider alternative travel options, such as car sharing, cycling, walking or public transport, wherever possible.<sup>46</sup>

## 4 Free hospital parking in Wales – an ongoing challenge

The Welsh Government committed to remove charges for hospital parking from April 2008 and all Welsh NHS Health Boards and Trusts were required to produce a car parking plan by May 2008 to show how they would meet the costs of the abolition of charges, encourage green transport and manage demand.<sup>47</sup>

For car parks where there were commercial contracts in place and trusts were legally bound to honour the terms of those contracts, NHS Health Boards were required to introduce schemes to reduce costs for patients, staff and visitors. These schemes were to remain in

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, A (2022) Parking rules change for Edinburgh hospital staff BBC News Website. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-60234607>

<sup>44</sup>Flett, A (2021) 'Absolute chaos': Patients risk missing appointments as parking demand soars at Ninewells Hospital <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/dundee/2728785/patients-missing-appointments-parking-demand-ninewells-hospital/>

<sup>45</sup>Diouri, A (2020) 'Shocking drain' as millions lost to missed appointments at PRI and Ninewells. The Courier News Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/perth-kinross/1724770/shocking-drain-as-millions-lost-to-missed-appointments-at-pri-and-ninewells/>

<sup>46</sup>Flett, A (2021) 'Absolute chaos': Patients risk missing appointments as parking demand soars at Ninewells Hospital <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/dundee/2728785/patients-missing-appointments-parking-demand-ninewells-hospital/>

<sup>47</sup> Minister for Health and Social Services, Reform of car parking charges in the NHS in Wales, 3 March 2008. [Online]. Available at:

[https://senedd.wales/Ministerial%20Statements%20Documents/Reform%20of%20Car%20Parking%20Charges%20in%20the%20NHS%20in%20Wales%20\(PDF,%2010.8kb\)-03032008-80126/dat20080303-e-English.pdf](https://senedd.wales/Ministerial%20Statements%20Documents/Reform%20of%20Car%20Parking%20Charges%20in%20the%20NHS%20in%20Wales%20(PDF,%2010.8kb)-03032008-80126/dat20080303-e-English.pdf)

place until the end of the contractual commitments.<sup>48</sup> The last of those contractual arrangements ended in 2018 meaning all hospital parking is now free across Wales.<sup>49</sup>

In the same year, the Welsh Government released updated car parking management guidance for NHS Wales. Its key principles are that local management should:

- Protect disabled parking spaces and access for emergency vehicles;
- Encourage people to use alternative means of travel;
- Encourage the development of sustainable transport hubs; and
- Encourage people to only park on hospital sites for hospital business.<sup>50</sup>

Wales' largest hospital, University Hospital Wales (UHW), abolished car parking charges in 2018 after its PFI contract with a private car parking company, came to an end. Parking is currently free at the hospital but drivers must register at one of 40 terminals if they are planning to stay longer than four hours.<sup>51</sup>

Since the removal of car parking charges, a number of issues have emerged, in particular that of staff and visitors parking in nearby residential streets due to lack of spaces in the hospital. This has the knock-on effect of limiting spaces for residents and blocking driveways. Commentators suggest that administrative, non-clinical staff are taking up a significant amount of the available spaces during 9-5 hours. Furthermore, local politicians suggest that the situation is being further aggravated as the hospital does not have an adequate transport hub or interchange for buses.<sup>52</sup>

In an attempt to ease congestion in and around the hospital site, Cardiff and Vale Health Board announced a number of changes to parking at UHW and other hospital sites under its management. Under the changes, parking will remain free, however patients and visitors will need to park in designated patient car parks and comply with local on-site parking regulations.<sup>53</sup> The regulations include that parking is free for the first four hours, after which time patients and visitors can get additional hours free by entering their registration into electronic screens in the hospitals. However, under the changes, the additional time allowed is being reduced from four hours to two.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, all staff who wish to park will need to ensure they have a permit to give them access to specific designated staff parking areas.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in footnote 14

<sup>49</sup> All NHS hospital car parking charges scrapped in Wales. BBC News Website, 1 September 2018. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45347166>

<sup>50</sup> Welsh Health Circular (2018) Car parking management- guidance for NHS Wales, 010, 5 April

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/car-parking-management-guidance-for-nhs-wales.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Binns, M (2019) Parking problems worse at Heath despite end of hospital charges. The Cardiffian News Website

<https://jomec.co.uk/thecardiffian/2019/11/12/parking-problems-get-worse-in-heath-despite-hospital-charges-being-scrapped/>

<sup>52</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>53</sup> Barnes, D (2021) Parking to remain free in all Cardiff and Vale hospitals. South Wales Argus News Website. [Online] available at: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/19698587.parking-remain-free-cardiff-vale-hospitals/>

<sup>54</sup> Smith, M (2020) Health boss blames NHS staff for parking problems at Cardiff and Vale hospitals. Wales Online News Website. [Online] Available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/health-boss-blames-nhs-staff-17569907>

<sup>55</sup> Barnes, D (2021) Parking to remain free in all Cardiff and Vale hospitals. South Wales Argus News Website. [Online] available at: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/19698587.parking-remain-free-cardiff-vale-hospitals/>

In 2021, the health board has also reinstated its free park and ride service at UHW. The service is operated by Cardiff Bus and is free for patients, visitors and staff. Professor Stuart Walker, interim Chief Executive of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, said:

*'In line with our commitments to sustainable travel we do not have plans to build more car parking spaces. Instead we are investing in greener alternatives including the Park and Ride which is free for all our patients, visitors and staff to use. We also have Next bike points (Bike Rental) at UHW which are a low-cost alternative to owning a bike. Furthermore, we have saved a number of staff miles through flexible working which has reduced the number of vehicles coming to our site each day.'*<sup>56</sup>

## 5 Hospital parking charges in England

Hospital car parking charges have long been a controversial topic in England and the COVID-19 pandemic reignited the discussion when charges were temporarily lifted for staff, patients and visitors.<sup>57</sup>

The Department of Health and Social Care Minister Edward Argar confirmed, in answer to a parliamentary question, that the government is still committed to provide free car parking for staff at NHS hospital facilities for the duration of the pandemic, and trusts continue to be funded to deliver this commitment. However, the Minister also stated that no commitment has been made to assess the potential merits of continuing free parking beyond the end of the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>58</sup>

### 5.1 Charges to remain but exemptions have been expanded

In December 2019, the UK Government said it intended that, from April 2020, blue badge holders, frequent outpatients with long-term conditions, parents of sick children staying in hospital overnight and staff working night shifts, would be offered free parking at specific times.<sup>59</sup> Implementation of the new policy was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, however, in April 2021, new NHS car parking guidance was published and NHS trusts in England are required under the terms of their NHS contracts, to deliver these concessions:

Disabled people - this is for holders of a valid Blue Badge attending hospital as a patient or visitor, or for a disabled person employed by the hospital trust. Disabled patients and visitors receive free parking for the duration of their attendance at, or visit to, the hospital. Disabled

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<sup>56</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>57</sup> Lintern, S (2021) Hospitals to introduce free car parking for some patients from next month. The Independent Newspaper Website. [Online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/nhs-hospitals-england-car-parking-b1824544.html>

<sup>58</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/15302>

<sup>59</sup> Loft, P and Parkin, E (2021) NHS hospital car parking policies in the UK, Briefing Paper Number 8912 [Online] Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8912/CBP-8912.pdf>

employees receive free parking while at the hospital for purposes relating to their employment.

Frequent outpatient attenders - free parking will be provided to all out-patients who attend hospital for an appointment at least three times within a month and for an overall period of at least three months. A 'month' is defined as a period of 30 days.

Parents of sick children staying overnight - this is for a parent or guardian of a child or young person, under 18 years of age, who is admitted as an inpatient at hospital overnight. They receive free parking between the hours of 7.30pm and 8am while visiting the child. This would apply to a maximum of two vehicles.

Staff working night shifts - this is for members of staff with a shift commencing after 7.30pm and ending before 8am. They receive free parking for the duration of their shift.<sup>60</sup>

It is worth noting that the NHS Long Term Plan published in January 2019 committed NHS England to reduce mileage and air pollution from rapid response vehicles and patient and staff journeys by a fifth by 2024.<sup>61</sup> NHS England also intends to increase the number of virtual appointments to reduce the need for travel. This is intended to remove "the need for up to a third of face-to face outpatient visits, reducing outpatient visits by 30 million a year nationally".<sup>62</sup>

Given the focus on reducing mileage and air pollution, it is questionable as to whether free parking, which is reported to increase car usage to and from hospitals, would be compatible with sustainability initiatives.

## 6 Hospital parking in Northern Ireland is under strain

Recently the Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, stated that:

*'Car parking is at a premium on several hospital sites across Northern Ireland, causing accessibility issues for patients and visitors. This is impacting on patient appointments and visiting sessions because of the lengthy queues forming to gain access to our hospitals'.<sup>63</sup>*

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<sup>60</sup> NHS car parking guidance 2021 for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts, April 2021

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles>

<sup>61</sup> NHS England (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan [Online] <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhs-long-term-plan-version-1.2.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> NHS England (2019) NHS Long Term Plan implementation framework, para 2.25. "Outpatients" are patients who attend a hospital for treatment without staying overnight [Online] Available at: <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/long-term-plan-implementation-framework-v1.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> HSC staff car parking to resume normal service department of Health Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/hsc-staff-car-parking-resume-normal-service>



The difficulties with hospital parking, particularly in Belfast Trust hospital sites, are well documented. Several media reports indicate that queues to find a parking space at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children are resulting in anxiety for parents and missed appointments.<sup>64</sup> There have also been complaints from local residents regarding staff parking in residential parking spaces around the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) site.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, reports have highlighted that when non-RVH medical staff need to attend the hospital urgently for clinical reasons such as completion of mental health forms, discharge planning, safeguarding and best interest meetings they often have to queue to park in the visitor car park.<sup>66</sup>

In relation to health and safety, professional bodies have raised concerns about their members' safety when they have parked on side streets far from their place of work. In some instances, members are having to walk back to their car alone and in the dark (during the winter months) which increases the risk to their personal safety.<sup>67</sup>

Craigavon Area Hospital run by the Southern Area Health Trust have also reported ongoing issues with car parking and traffic congestion, including motorists frequently parking inappropriately in blue badge only spots.<sup>68</sup>

A public consultation exercise undertaken during preparation of the Private Members Hospital Parking Charges Bill introduced in 2021 showed an overwhelming majority of respondents supported the abolition of hospital parking charges.<sup>69</sup> However, the Belfast Health Trust reports that feedback they have received from staff and patients in relation to parking does not identify that the cost of parking is unreasonable but rather concerns, in the first instance, relate to the availability of parking.<sup>70</sup>

## 7 What are the solutions to parking problems?

Guidance to support hospital parking policies have been introduced in every region across the UK:

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<sup>64</sup>Halliday, G (2019) Parents hit out at Belfast children's hospital parking chaos. Belfast Telegraph News Website. [Online] Available at: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/parents-hit-out-at-belfast-childrens-hospital-parking-chaos-37980907.html>

<sup>65</sup>West Belfast residents fury at parking 'nightmare' from hospital workers <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/west-belfast-residents-fury-at-parking-nightmare-from-hospital-workers-40794153.html>

<sup>66</sup> Corr, S (2021) Belfast Royal Victoria Hospital car park delays "an ongoing issue with no quick fix", Trust admits Belfast Live Website. [Online] available at: <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/belfast-royal-victoria-hospital-car-20894731>

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/nic-ictu-health-unions.pdf>

<sup>68</sup>Corr, S (2017) Parking 'inappropriately' at Craigavon Hospital could now cost you £60 <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/parkinginappropriately-craigavon-hospital-could-13345312>

<sup>69</sup> Hospital Parking Charges Bill: Second Stage, Private Members' Business 22nd November 2021. They work for you website. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2021-11-22.7.1>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

- Northern Ireland - Health Estates Agency Guidance –HSC Hospital Car Parking Provision and Management (2008).<sup>71</sup>
- England – NHS car parking guidance 2021 for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts (2021).<sup>72</sup>
- Scotland - Revised Guidance on Hospital Car Park Charging, The Scottish Government CEL 1 (2008).<sup>73</sup>
- Wales - Welsh Health Circular car parking management- guidance for NHS Wales (2018).<sup>74</sup>

A number of consistent themes have emerged across the policies including to:

- Protect disabled parking spaces and access for emergency vehicles;
- Encourage people to use alternative means of travel;
- Encourage the development of sustainable transport hubs; and
- Encouraging people to only park on hospital sites for hospital business.

## 7.1 Technology to support hospital parking

Digital investments in healthcare are already broadly adopted as they help increase organisational performance, productivity and add value to medical services. Hospitals are also beginning to embrace digitalisation with respect to their parking infrastructure.<sup>75</sup>

### 7.1.1 Automatic Number Plate Recognition

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology is increasingly being used to monitor movements in and out of hospital car parks. ANPR cameras are placed at the entrance and exit points of the car park. The cameras capture the licence plate details of vehicles entering and leaving the car park. The built-in number plate recognition system can then correlate the licence plate data with a range of markers including DVLA information, pre-booked slots and permit holder information.<sup>76</sup> The use of ANPR technology has been recommended by both the Welsh and the UK Government in their guidance on car parking.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Health Estates Agency (2008) Guidance –HSC Hospital Car Parking Provision and Management, June: Available online at: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health\\_estates\\_guidancefor\\_hsc\\_hospital\\_car\\_parking\\_provision\\_and\\_management.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_estates_guidancefor_hsc_hospital_car_parking_provision_and_management.pdf)

<sup>72</sup> NHS car parking guidance 2021 for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts, April 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles>

<sup>73</sup> Revised Guidance On Hospital Car Park Charging, The Scottish Government CEL 1 (2008) 18 January 2008 [Online] Available at: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=Scottish+Government+Circular+CEL+1+%282008%29+sets+out+guidance+on+hospital+access+and+parking>

<sup>74</sup> Welsh Health Circular (2018) Car parking management- guidance for NHS Wales, 010, 5 April <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/car-parking-management-guidance-for-nhs-wales.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Skowronek, I (2021) Why Smart Hospitals Need Digital Parking? Medium News Website. [Online] available at: <https://medium.com/geekculture/why-smart-hospitals-need-digital-parking-unlocking-the-potential-of-smart-parking-technologies-to-d63992d332e9>

<sup>76</sup> How can protecting bays reduce parking anxiety? Parking Eye Website. [Online] Available at: <https://www.parkingeye.co.uk/car-park-management/how-can-protecting-bays-reduce-parking-anxiety/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/car-parking-management-guidance-for-nhs-wales.pdf>

### 7.1.2 Benefits of ANPR

ANPR-run car parks can be configured to allow for a range of parking options, including:

- Maximum stay, for example a four-hour limit;
- Permit only, where approved vehicles have their details pre-loaded to an approved white list;
- Limited free time parking, such as the first three hours being free which reverts to paid parking for longer stays; and
- A range of all of the above options, on the same car park site.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, ANPR negates the need for barriers meaning a more efficient flow within car parks. Usually, after entering the car park in their vehicle, motorists are required to validate their presence by entering their car's registration number into an on-site machine. Where a user overstays their allotted time, or in the case of carparks that charge, does not pay their fee, the user can be issued with a Penalty Charge notice (PCN). Where car parks are charging a fee, ANPR facilitates ticketless payments where users are able to enter their registration plate at the payment terminal or online through an app to make a payment.<sup>79</sup>

The technology also facilitates payment on leaving options, which can help reduce anxiety among patients if their appointment runs over and avoids the inconvenience of having to return to the terminal multiple times. The guidance released by the UK Government suggests that trusts should consider installing 'pay on exit' type schemes so that drivers pay only for the time that they have used. Additional charges should only be imposed where reasonable and should be waived when overstaying is beyond the driver's control.<sup>80</sup>

The technology also allows for pre-book and pre-pay platforms. The cameras identify the registered vehicle on entrance and exit and match licence plates with pre-booked appointments without the need for on-site payments or registering at a terminal in the case of free parking.<sup>81</sup>

ANPR can also be used to monitor parking in specialised bays including blue badge spaces, ambulance bays and charging points for electric vehicles. Cameras are installed beside the parking bay for example in a discrete bollard. This watches the bay and correlates registration plates to ensure the bay is only used by users with a genuine need or permission.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR), SMART Parking Website [Online] Available at:

<https://www.smartparking.com/smartpark-system/anpr>

<sup>79</sup> Barriers and ANPR Cameras To Be Installed At St Mary's The Island Echo News Website [Online] Available at:

<https://www.islandecho.co.uk/barriers-anpr-cameras-installed-st-marys/>

<sup>80</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2021) NHS car parking guidance 2021 for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles/nhs-patient-visitor-and-staff-car-parking-principles#mandatory-elements>

<sup>81</sup> Salamane, K (2021) What is Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)? Norttech Website [Online] Available at: <https://blog.norttechcontrol.com/what-is-anpr>

<sup>82</sup> Cited directly above

### 7.1.3 Concerns about ANPR

While ANPR technology has been implemented widely across Health Trusts in the UK, NI Health Trusts are calling for more robust research on the technology. Their concerns include:

- Whether it would be suitable for an ageing and growing population;
- In the case of pre-booking slots, whether people would engage with the technology before attending a hospital site; and
- Whether the significant capital need to implement the wider use of this technology would be available.

It is worth noting that the use of ANPR technology has not been without controversy. There have been several media reports across the UK concerning drivers being issued tickets when they say they did not overstay the car park's time limit, penalised when using the same car park more than once in a single day or when drivers didn't know there was a time limit on free parking.<sup>83</sup>

ANPR technology rarely considers human error and behaviour and does not usually consider giving a grace period when a motorist enters a car park. This means that those drivers who enter the car park and don't find a space can be charged, as the camera saw them enter and leave, but can find no matching ticket. Similarly, a mistyped ticket at a ticket machine, for example, using the letter 'O' instead of a zero, can result in a fine, as the system cannot find a matching ticket to the number plate the cameras read.<sup>84</sup>

As with any technology that handles data there are important questions about how parking technologies including ANPR cameras should be used to serve the public. The fact that images and records are kept and stored raises privacy concerns. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is the UK's independent body for upholding information rights and welcomes complaints about camera misuse. The ICO has published a CCTV Code of Practice that covers ANPR use and its compliance with the Data Protection Act.<sup>85</sup>

## 7.2 Health Trusts across the UK are engaging with parking technology

In 2015, the Northumbria Healthcare Trust undertook an initiative at four of their hospital sites in the North East of England aimed at improving parking services for visitors, patients and staff by implementing a single parking policy across the whole trust.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/cars/article-8818617/ANPR-car-park-camera-penalties-rise.html> **and** <https://www.ipswichstar.co.uk/news/health/ipswich-hospital-parking-anpr-system-difficulties-8036692>

<sup>84</sup> The benefits of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems. Total parking Solutions Website [Online] Available at: <https://www.totalparking.co.uk/news-and-media/news-archive/the-benefits-of-automatic-number-plate-recognition-anpr-systems>

<sup>85</sup> Information Commissioners Office (2018) In the picture: A data protection code of practice for surveillance cameras and personal information Data protection [Online] Available at: <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1542/cctv-code-of-practice.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> [https://www.buildingbetterhealthcare.com/news/article\\_page/Parking\\_improvements\\_at\\_Northumbria\\_hospitals/128705](https://www.buildingbetterhealthcare.com/news/article_page/Parking_improvements_at_Northumbria_hospitals/128705)

In conjunction with technology company DESIGNA, the existing Pay & Display barrier system which was becoming unreliable and difficult for users was replaced to allow car parks to be networked and controlled from 1 server based in a central control room managing over 1,800+ parking spaces and from where all intercom calls are centrally answered.<sup>87</sup> The system includes ANPR for both visitor and staff parking, four way reading of tickets, intercom with driver camera and multiple payment options including contactless. The technology also provides reporting capabilities which provides trusts with data from each of its carparks to help identify any further improvements that can be made.<sup>88</sup>

Feedback from the trust on the implementation of the technology has been positive. Owen Cusack, Deputy Director Estates & Facilities at the NHS Northumbria Health Care Trust reported that:

*'It is often the case that tickets must be inserted a specific way around which can lead to confusion and hold ups at ticket terminals. With the 4- way ticket, our patients, most often elderly, and visitors can insert their ticket into the machine in any direction and it will always be read. With this problem eliminated we hope that our patients and visitors find it much easier and quicker.'*

*The use of ANPR cameras allows the trust to track and store data on all cars that visit the car parks, including cars belonging to staff. The use of ANPR is also significantly speeding up the traffic flow in and out of the car park<sup>89</sup>*

The University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff switched to a similar digitised system when the Welsh Government abolished hospital carparking charges in 2018. In addition to a number of new policies discussed earlier in this paper such as the re-introduction of parking permits, ANPR cameras were installed across the hospital site with parking charge notices issued either by on-site wardens walking the site or via post via the ANPR cameras.<sup>90</sup>

Access control, connectivity to patient services and real-time reservation of spaces are all technically feasible with available and emerging technology, however, this can only be achieved with appropriate planning, procurement and implementation of the necessary parking management systems.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> <https://designa.com/en-gb/references/northumbria-health-care-trust>

<sup>88</sup> [https://www.buildingbetterhealthcare.com/news/article\\_page/Parking\\_improvements\\_at\\_Northumbria\\_hospitals/128705](https://www.buildingbetterhealthcare.com/news/article_page/Parking_improvements_at_Northumbria_hospitals/128705)

<sup>89</sup> Northumbria Health Care Trust, UK Future proof of the parking access & revenue control system <https://designa.com/en-gb/references/northumbria-health-care-trust>

<sup>90</sup> Smith, M (2018) Parking at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff is now free

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/parking-wales-largest-hospital-free-14741629>

<sup>91</sup> Greenslade, S (2021) Free parking concessions at hospitals kick-in Health Business Magazine Website. [Online] Available at: <https://healthbusinessuk.net/features/free-parking-concessions-hospitals-kick>

Health trusts in Northern Ireland have also indicated that the implementation of parking technology would incur significant costs and it is unclear where this funding would come from particularly if the income from parking charges is lost.<sup>92</sup>

### 7.3 Making better use of data

Research suggests that patients are not so concerned about the issues of travelling long distances when it is for a specialist intervention, such as surgery. However, it becomes much more of an issue when they need follow-up care or more regular treatment. Aside from having more rehab and community services delivered closer to home, patients highlighted the need for more joined up planning in both health care and transportation planning:

*"It would be nice to have one appointment rather than several, so if I needed a scan, blood tests and a consultation, I could have them all in the same day rather than going backwards and forwards."*<sup>93</sup>

Block booking appointments could reduce the number of times a person has to visit a hospital which could have a knock-on effect of reducing congestion in car parks. Public transport services often do not work with appointment times allocated by a hospital - when patients are given appointment times that are before the first available public transport would get them there. This also applies to staff whose shifts can start and end at times when public transport is not running.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, public transport often doesn't provide a direct link to hospital sites and patients and staff need to take multiple modes of transport, or change a few times, adding more time and stress to their journey. This is particularly challenging for people with long-term conditions who may be living with chronic pain or reduced mobility.<sup>95</sup>

Through procurement and implementation of technology, health trusts and transport planners could make more intelligent use of patient data. For example, this could include hospitals matching up records on address, patient preferences regarding transport and data from local public transport timetables and using this to support smart scheduling when offering patients appointment slots. Technology can also be used to keep patients better informed about on-

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<sup>92</sup> Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017--2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>93</sup>Health Watch (2019) There and back. What people tell us about their experiences of travelling to and from NHS services <https://web.archive.org/web/20200505081840/https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/sites/healthwatch.co.uk/files/20191016%20People%27s%20experiences%20of%20patient%20transport%20Formatted%20final.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> Health Watch (2019) There and back. What people tell us about their experiences of travelling to and from NHS services <https://web.archive.org/web/20200505081840/https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/sites/healthwatch.co.uk/files/20191016%20People%27s%20exper1111iencies%20of%20patient%20transport%20Formatted%20final.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> Cited directly above

the-day waiting times, so people can make informed choices about when to arrive, saving money in parking fees and reducing demand on spaces.<sup>96</sup>

#### **7.4 People who are digitally excluded**

Digital technology is increasingly enabling more appointments to happen remotely, either via phone or video conferencing services, such as Skype or FaceTime. For some people this will mean they can avoid having to make a journey at all, which has several benefits for the patient and the hospital with regard to congestion and parking.

However, it is important to remember that although many people would be happy to access healthcare professionals online, there are people who cannot do so for a variety of reasons, such as cost, poor access to broadband internet, lack of computer confidence or skills, or a preference for face-to-face interactions.<sup>97</sup>

#### **7.5 Sustainable travel options**

Given the difficulties and costs of increasing parking supply, it is suggested that tackling parking issues at hospitals requires a strategy that seeks to reduce demand for parking.

For example, the Royal Hospital in Belfast is unlikely to see any expansion of its car parking, given the high capital cost associated with building a car park and the competing demands for capital investment. The Trust is also bound by the planning constraints of the Roads Services and Belfast City Council Planners who will resist any increase in car parking capacity on the site given the consequent impact on the surrounding road's network and the local community in terms of air quality and congestion.<sup>98</sup>

Irrespective of whether parking charges are eliminated, there is still a need to improve hospital parking infrastructure in the interest of visitor and staff satisfaction and long-term sustainability. Consequently, measures that can promote better use of car-parks within hospital trusts including sustainable transport options, car-park management, car-park equipment and security measures could ease the demand on car park spaces.

In Adenbrooke Hospital, run by the Cambridge University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in England, car-park occupancy levels often reach and surpass 100%. However, the site has implemented a number of sustainable transport initiatives that have reduced the need for visitors, and especially staff, to travel by car to and from the site. Achievements in managing

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<sup>96</sup> Bewick, I (2018) Ten better ways to solve parking problems at hospitals than free parking

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ten-better-ways-solve-parking-problems-hospitals-than-ian-bewick>

<sup>97</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

traffic generation have been recognised nationally and the hospital has received an award for successful implementation of its travel plan. Measures include:

- Secure parking for cyclists and an on-site cycle surgery and sales service;
- Two park-and-ride services for patients, visitors and staff;
- Bus station located on site with over 60 buses per hour from all areas within Cambridge;
- Car-share scheme for staff;
- The use of electric bikes for staff, with charge points for bikes and electric vehicles;
- Courtesy bus for staff and visitors that serves the site;
- Interest-free loans for rail travel and motorcycle purchase up to 250 cc
- Concessionary bus and rail tickets for staff;
- free motorcycle parking; and
- Cycle and footway routes in and around the site.

Since 1993, the percentage of staff traveling to the hospital site by car has halved. The Trust describes this as a very necessary achievement as the total number of staff travel journeys to the hospital on a daily basis has grown from around 4,000 journeys to over 10,000 for the same period. It is also reported that over the past decade the proportion of staff travelling to work as the sole occupant of a car has fallen from 74% to 34%.<sup>99</sup>

The Trust also undertook a major reapplication and restructuring process for all existing staff eligible to park on-site in 2019. It is hoped that, over time, this will result in an additional 1000 members of staff making the peak-period transition to the more sustainable commuting options of park-and-ride, cycling, public transport and car-sharing.<sup>100</sup>

The Belfast Trust Travel Plan 2018 supports incentives for staff to avail of alternative travel options to single occupant car journeys. The Trust provides a range of information for staff on sustainable travel on its dedicated intranet hub page. Staff can also apply for the following, some of which are salary sacrifice/ income tax saving initiatives such as the cycle to work scheme; a Lift/car share scheme and an annual Translink card.<sup>101</sup>

The Trust have also completed the following projects:

- Providing a free Park & Ride Service from Black's Road to the Royal Hospital's site that operates every 30 minutes between 7am and 6.30pm;

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<sup>99</sup> 2020 Vision at Addenbrooke's, The future of the hospital Campus. Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust <https://files.cambridge.gov.uk/public/ldf/coredocs/RD-SS/RD-SS-070.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> What are we doing about sustainability? <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/about-us/our-structure/other-departments/think-green/what-are-we-doing-about-sustainability/>

<sup>101</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>



- Providing an Internal Shuttle Bus Service between Royal Hospitals and Belfast City Hospital;
- Providing individual personalised travel plans;
- Improving secure cycle parking facilities for cyclists on hospital sites;
- Provided cycle training for staff and developed Safe Cycling Routes between sites
- Installed Belfast Bikes docking stations at key sites;
- Provided cycle repair stations at Royal Hospitals and BCH; and
- Provided free secure covered parking for motorcycles and mopeds at Royal Hospital.<sup>102</sup>

The Travel Plan will also benefit from forthcoming initiatives that will support the objective to reduce single car journeys by staff. These include:

- The Belfast Bicycle Network to support safer cycling;
- Expansion of the Belfast Bikes Scheme with more stations adjacent to trust facilities;
- Provision of additional Park & Ride Facilities by Translink; and
- Construction of a Translink public transport hub on the Grosvenor Road adjacent to the Royal Hospitals and Belfast City Hospital sites.<sup>103</sup>

### 7.5.1 Encouraging sustainable travel options among staff

Along with cost, the difficulty of finding a parking space is a significant concern of patients and visitors – a way to make more spaces available to patients and visitors may be to free up spaces currently used by staff. Staff are the most regular commuters to and from hospital sites and trusts have direct communication channels with staff so, from a travel planning perspective, focus on reducing staff parking demand could be the most efficient approach.<sup>104</sup>

Ensuring large hospital sites are well served by public transport would help to maximise the opportunities presented for staff to use these services rather than driving to work. Proactively supporting staff to get to and from work could help with recruitment and retention of staff, particularly lower paid staff, which is one of the key issues facing health services.

Some staff, for example those allied health professionals who are required to carry equipment and make community visits, are not able to use public transport. Similarly, for staff who have to commute long distances from areas where public transport is not accessible or staff who work unsociable hours there is a need for them to be accommodated within a hospital parking structure. Many trusts in England have distance-based exclusion zones where locally-based staff cannot obtain a permit.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> Cited directly above

<sup>104</sup> Bewick, I (2018) Ten better ways to solve parking problems at hospitals than free parking <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ten-better-ways-solve-parking-problems-hospitals-than-ian-bewick>

<sup>105</sup> Bewick, I (2018) Ten better ways to solve parking problems at hospitals than free parking <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ten-better-ways-solve-parking-problems-hospitals-than-ian-bewick>

The Belfast Trust is enacting a similar process where the application of permit criteria will prioritise car parking for those staff who do not have ready and easy access to alternative travel modes because of their shift pattern, work requirements, caring responsibilities or other substantial reason(s). The new application and assessment process is currently being rolled out to include staff at the Royal, Belfast City and Mater Hospitals.<sup>106</sup>

With the extension of agile and flexible working during the pandemic more non-clinical staff are working from home, such as HR and admin, which helps to ease demand for staff parking and there is a focus on how this might work in the longer term.<sup>107</sup>

## 8 Conclusion

Opponents of hospital parking charges say it is a tax on those who are unwell. However, even the most vocal opponents, such as the Patients Association, acknowledge that there are many complicating factors, from the cost of car park management and maintenance, to the availability of spaces and need for NHS funds in general.

Eliminating parking charges will undoubtedly remove what is often a financial burden for staff, patients and visitors. However, it will not change the current congestion, excessive waiting times and lack of appropriate parking that currently exists in and around hospital sites in Northern Ireland.

Suggestions to reduce congestion and the demand on car parking spaces include ensuring that hospitals become local hubs for public and active transport; discount public transport instead of subsidising car parking; introduce means tested parking permits, with increased parking charges for shorter commutes; and expanding onsite changing rooms and cycle storage.

Using existing and emerging technology to support the elimination of hospital charges and reduce congestion is becoming increasingly popular. Access control, connectivity to patient services and real-time reservation of spaces are all technically feasible, however, this can only be achieved with appropriate planning, procurement and implementation of the necessary parking management systems. It is unclear whether capital would be available to support the implementation of this type of technology, particularly if car parking charges are removed.

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<sup>106</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

<sup>107</sup> Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (2021) Evidence from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the Committee for Health on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. [Online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/committee-blocks/health/2017---2022/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust.pdf>

Ultimately, all decisions around car parking charges, whether to eliminate or retain them, should be set in the context of a long-term transportation plan that includes park and ride systems, as well as increasing people's ability to use public transport, cycling facilities etc.