

AHPFNI submission to Health Committee in respect to the Car parking bill

13th December 2021

The Allied Health Professions Federation Northern Ireland (AHPF NI) provides collective, independent leadership and representation on common issues that impact on its 13 member professions. AHPs are a diverse group of practitioners each recognised for their autonomy and ability to be innovative in finding solutions to challenges and developing new way of working especially within multidisciplinary settings.

AHPFNI would like to thank the NI Health Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission for review on the Car parking bill.

We would agree that car parking charges should be abolished for staff, patients and visitors within the HSC in Northern Ireland.

It is vital to note that car parking charges have been abolished in both Wales and Scotland from 2008/2009.

Currently we have serious workforce shortages with immense recruitment and retention problems throughout most of the allied health professions. The delivery of this bill would provide an additional incentive to working for the HSC. We do acknowledge the removal of car parking charges during the covid pandemic, and this was greatly appreciated by the AHP workforce.

Many of the AHP's utilise a range of equipment to provide care for patients. This must be taken with them to visit patients in the community and therefore it is important to understand that these particular AHP's are not able to use public transport as a car is required to do this.

Many of the AHP workforce travel lengthy distances from their homes and public transport is neither accessible nor at convenient times especially for those that work shift patterns within a 24hour / 7-day rota. With rising fuel costs these staff are financially disadvantaged yet again having to pay for car parking in their workplace.

In relation to health and safety many of the professional bodies have raised concerns about their members safety when they have parked on side streets far from their place of work. This is mainly due to limited parking spaces and high parking charges. 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. Having free parking could enable members to park closer to their workplace, avoiding the need for walking alone.

The removal of the car parking charges will not deal with the capacity issues which should be noted. In one trust there are approximately 2000 staff waiting on a car parking space and in some cases, it can take up to 3 years to be allocated a space, this needs to be addressed.

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.

Car parking fees go against the very ethos of the NHS, free at the point of access and we must ensure that these fees are abolished.