



# **FREE CAR PARKING FOR PATIENTS, VISITORS AND STAFF AT NHS SITES IN SCOTLAND**

**UNISON Scotland's response to Paul Martin's Consultation on the proposed NHS Parking (Scotland) Bill**

**April 2009**

## Executive Summary

- UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on Paul Martin's Private member's NHS Parking (Scotland) Bill and is happy to support it.
- UNISON Scotland has been at the forefront of the campaign against car parking charges in Scotland since the summer of 2007 when several health boards across Scotland decided to charge all patients, visitors and staff at their hospitals up to £7.00 a day for parking their cars on hospital premises.
- Although most car parking charges were recently abolished this did not apply to the three PFI-operated hospital car parks: - Ninewells in Dundee, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and Glasgow Royal Infirmary.
- In addition, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have introduced a policy limiting parking to 4 hours before imposing a penalty.
- UNISON believes this policy is a tax on the sick as well as staff who have to work at these hospitals.
- Patients attending hospitals for out-patient treatment and visitors concerned with the health of their families should not have to worry about the cost of parking at a hospital.
- Staff employed in the health service frequently have to work long hours with different shift patterns and many need to travel to their place of work by car.
- UNISON Scotland is pleased to support the proposed NHS Parking Charges (Scotland) Bill

## **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest public sector trade union representing over 160,000 members delivering public services, more than 60,000 of whom work in the NHS. We represent the majority of the employees in the National Health Service in Scotland including senior managers, nursing staff at all levels, allied health professionals, administrative and clerical, ancillary staff, laboratory staff, technicians and paramedics. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Paul Martin's Private member's NHS Parking (Scotland) Bill and is pleased to support it.

## **General Comments**

UNISON Scotland has been at the forefront of the campaign against car parking charges in Scotland since the summer of 2007 when several health boards across Scotland decided to charge all patients, visitors and staff at their hospitals up to £7.00 a day for parking their cars on hospital premises.

UNISON's members in Glasgow started a campaign of action against these charges, targeting their members, politicians and local residents. Following a review, charges were pegged at £3.00 a day and eventually scrapped at 14 hospitals across Scotland at the beginning of this year.

However, there are still charges at the three PFI-operated hospital car parks: - Ninewells in Dundee, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and although Greater Glasgow And Clyde Health Board had to abandon their charges, they compounded difficulties for staff, by bringing in a policy limiting parking to 4 hours before imposing a penalty. This Bill will commit the Scottish Government to bringing these car parking contracts to an end and providing adequate free car parking at all NHS facilities.

UNISON believes this policy is a tax on the sick as well as staff who have to work at these hospitals. Staff employed in the health service frequently have to work long hours with different shift patterns and many need to travel to their place of work by car. In addition, many NHS staff do not live in areas with access to suitable public transport to their place of work and they also need to travel by car. These workers, many of whom are very low paid, need access to free, safe car parking at their place of work.

For patients attending hospitals for out-patient treatment and visitors concerned with the health of their families, worrying about the cost of parking is the last thing they need, and as hospital procedures are notoriously unpredictable, having to rush out after four hours to move their care will in many cases just not be possible.

UNISON Scotland is pleased to support the proposed NHS Parking Charges (Scotland) Bill

## Consultation Questions

**1. Do you agree with my proposal that NHS Boards should be under a legal duty to make reasonable provision for the free parking of motor vehicles at NHS sites in Scotland?**

Yes – NHS Hospital sites employ significant numbers of people across Scotland. In many circumstances those staff are ‘specialists in their own field’ and do not necessarily live locally or on convenient public transport routes. The provision of a reasonable number of free parking spaces for staff should be provided for within the legislative framework, because some Health Boards have so far failed to provide reasonably for staff.

**2. Since the Scottish Government have issued guidance to ‘abolish’ parking charges at 14 of Scotland’s hospitals, have you been subject to parking restrictions at any of these hospitals? If so, how have these restrictions adversely affected you?**

Yes. UNISON members in some of our hospital sites have continued to experience difficulties. For example, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) have introduced a 4 hour maximum wait in patient parking areas which has limited the number of spaces available for staff use. NHSGGC has been engaged in the implementation of an Acute Services Strategy for many years, which as a result has closed or radically altered the look of many local NHS Hospitals. This policy which is based on the development of specialist centres forces staff to have to travel further to work and yet the NHS seems unwilling or unable to consider the need for staff parking as a priority.

Staff parking ‘off site’ has actually increased congestion in some areas, which in turn has placed a burden on local police and local authorities who are now being challenged by local communities and businesses to take action.

It is evident that by introducing car parking charges NHSGGC have ignored their boarder social responsibility.

**3. In what ways have parking restrictions adversely affected your ability to visit patients in NHS hospitals?**

NA

**4. From a patient’s perspective, in what ways have parking restrictions impacted on your ability to access patient care?**

There is continued evidence that some patients are still being ‘fined’ for parking out with the 4 hour maximum wait and within the grounds of the remaining PFI-operated car parks. Whilst some Boards may have mechanisms to wave these fines, UNISON is concerned that it is those patients and their relatives whose needs are most serious that are affected by this system. We do not believe that it is

reasonable for these car park users to have to explain why they were over the 4 hour limit and then 'request' that a fine is waved

**5. From a staff perspective, what impact have parking restrictions had on your ability to access your place of work**

As a result of the current arrangements in place across Scotland, many staff are now forced to park off site – this has a direct impact on the communities which surround our NHS Hospitals. Many communities are now in conflict with NHS staff over car parking. For example, at a recent meeting at the Southern General, a Community Police Officer described the off site parking as 'anti social'. We do not believe that this is acceptable.

By default of their location many NHS Hospitals are not well served by public transport, there is no evidence that this problem is being tackled or that for specialist staff this would result in a reasonable commute to work, if it were.

**6. Any other comments that you would like to make on my proposal?**

UNISON welcomes the proposal to make reasonable provision for the free parking of motor vehicles at NHS sites in Scotland. We believe that the introduction of such measures will benefit staff, patients and visitors and if fairly implemented will resolve much of the current tension around this issue.

UNISON has long opposed the use of PFI for the provision of public services. The current arrangements at PFI Parking arrangements at Glasgow Royal Infirmary are a case in point. The private car park lies under utilised most days, whilst staff and patients clog up local communities by parking off site.

The issue of car parking on NHS sites is bigger than just NHS Boards, it is not enough to simply 'move on' congestion from NHS sites to the wider community, we believe that legislative provision will ensure that NHS Boards take their responsibility to staff, patients and the wider community more seriously.

**For further information please contact:**

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