



“There is no public transport where I live. How do people cope with daily cancer treatment??”

“I struggled to go to hospital... new parking facilities & costs are horrendous”

The Hidden Costs of Free Healthcare

“(I believe) excessive parking cost is abuse of ... patients”

“There aren't any buses and if there were you cannot be sure you will get one back.”

“I no longer claim Travel Expenses”

“I visit the hospital myself 5–10 appointments per year at a parking cost of £2.00 per hour. My last appointment I was kept waiting 2 hours.... I only work part time.”

“People who have no transport cannot make early appointments.”

“I have had to go to Treliske & St Michael's, Hayle 4 times in the last month”

My husband is in the dementia ward ... in Launceston. From where I live the return journey is 53 miles. I do this twice a week to visit There is nowhere nearer for him to go.

FORWARD

This Report resulted from a survey conducted by Cornwall Campaigning Action Group, the Social Policy group within CAB Cornwall during the early part of 2009 to study problems people living in rural areas experience getting to hospital.

In November 2009 it was sent to Chief Executives of Hospitals, Primary Care Trusts and Transport Companies involved as well as the CEO of Cornwall Council with a request for comment prior to publication. To date we have received no comments.

Publication of this report was delayed until now as it was originally planned to form one third of a larger document on rural issues in Cornwall.

"The Hidden Costs of Free Healthcare" now becomes our second report in this series after "Remote Access" a study of the problems people in rural Cornwall experience accessing services.

Since compilation there have been some changes and developments of note including

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February 2010. National Citizens Advice response to a Government consultation request re Hospital Parking Charges – quotation of some of our findings and data.

June 2010. North Devon Hospital named in Which? Awards for the quality of its parking provision.

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May 2010. The operators of Royal Cornwall Hospital Treliske car-park increased the parking charges.

INTRODUCTION

Clients from CAB offices across Cornwall have commented frequently on the problems they experience getting to and from hospital, both for treatment and as visitors. Concerns have been expressed about the costs and practicality of travelling. The survey was conducted to add to this anecdotal commentary with some hard information.

SUMMARY

- Travel to hospital is a problem for CAB clients across Cornwall with a significant percentage attending more than 10 times a year.
- Costs are so high as to prevent those who need treatment from attending hospital or having to go into debt in order to do so. For visits to friends and family cost is a major factor.
- Over 30% of people have to complete a round trip of over 50 miles to visit their major hospital.
- Few are using public transport to get to hospital.
- Parking is a major source of anxiety.
- The Healthcare Travel Costs (HTC) Scheme is failing to help those in need, with widespread ignorance of its existence and confusion over its operation.

BACKGROUND

The cost of accessing hospital services is an issue across the country with charges for parking a primary concern. In Cornwall a major factor is the cost of travel to and from hospital, both as a patient and visitor, because of the lack of public transport. In March-April 2009 Cornwall Campaigning Action Group carried out a questionnaire-based survey of our clients, with some returns also from Age Concern groups, to add statistics to our anecdotal evidence.

The questionnaires addressed experience over the previous 12 months. Of the 411 questionnaires filled in and returned for analysis, 373 contained information about journeys actually made. The remaining 38 were returned by people who had not made a journey to hospital but who responded 'yes' to the question: 'Has the cost of getting to hospital ever stopped you going?' In addition to direct questions, comments were requested. 96 were received and a sample included in this report (see cover).

Cornwall has no motorways and limited rail and other public transport. There are not always bus links between larger population centres. It has only one major hospital, Treリスケ, at Truro, and consequently a substantial number of patients, particularly from the east, have to travel outside the county to access services.

The map on page 7 gives an indication of the geography involved.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

Why and how often do you go to hospital?

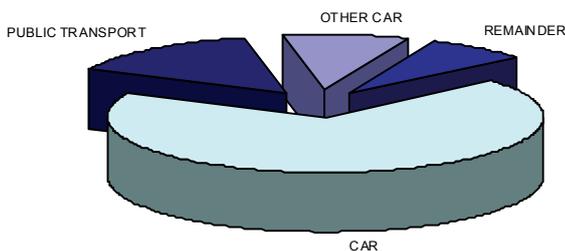
80%¹ of respondents who had travelled to a hospital attended as a patient, for treatment, 38% had gone to visit a patient and 10% accompanied patients.

For many, visiting hospital was not a one off event, having to make repeated visits in the past year. 36% of patients had travelled to hospital more than five times, with a similar figure for visitors/companions.

13% travelled for treatment more than 10 times while slightly more (17%) of visitors/companions made more than 10 journeys in the past year.

How did you travel?

Only 15% of travel to hospital was by public transport. The vast majority of journeys were by car (68%) either in the patient's own vehicle (51%), that of a friend or family member (14%) or a taxi (3%). Hospital cars or other transport schemes accounted for only 9% of journeys with the most significant of the remainder being by ambulance (6%).



Some non-drivers make good use of voluntary driver schemes and are very grateful for them, although the cost can be an issue.

When bus services are available they are appreciated, especially by people who

have a free bus pass, although several respondents reported shortcomings.

How far do you have to travel?

The location of the major hospitals – only one in Cornwall at Treliske, (Truro) the others being in Devon Derriford, (Plymouth) and North Devon (Barnstaple) - means many journeys to hospital are lengthy. More than 60% of travellers had round trips of over 20 miles. For a third of these the journey was more than 50 miles.

Scheduling of appointments frequently increases journey length and does not take into account the impact of a protracted and awkward day on the patient or their family.

Case Study

A 67 yr old man with a liver cancer diagnosis living in West Cornwall has to visit Derriford Hospital in Plymouth on a frequent basis to meet with his consultant. This is a round trip of 150 miles taking over 1hr 40mins each way by car or 3 hrs by bus/train.

How much does it cost to travel?

57% of respondents estimated their journey costs at £10 or less. 24% estimated them to be between £10 and £20. The remainder, almost 1/5th of respondents assessed their costs to be in excess of £20. (Respondents appear to underestimate these costs given the data on distances travelled.)

¹ Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Can you afford it?

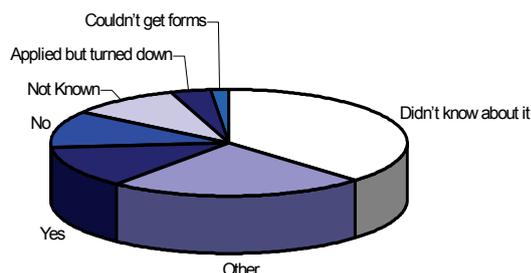
The questionnaire asked: 'Could you afford the cost of this travel?' With only 28% giving a positive response, the majority (54%) replied 'More or less' or 'With difficulty'.

While it could be contended the question begs a negative answer, 12% of respondents reported they had to use savings, borrow, use credit cards, or ask their family for help to cover transport costs.

Did you get help with the cost?

13% of respondents replied 'Yes', 11% said 'No', a further 4% had applied and been turned down, and 2% reported having been unable to get the necessary forms.

Of more significance however are the 60% of respondents who said they "didn't know that help with meeting travel costs was available" (37%), 'Not Known' (10%) or 'Other' (23%) indicating either ignorance or confusion about the HTC Scheme with many queries about eligibility rules and inconsistencies.



Some respondents have found the system for reclaiming travel costs so complex and aggravating that they no longer bother while others complained that, given the scheme was for those on very low incomes, the fact of having to pay first and

claim reimbursement later created additional difficulty.

Did you have to pay to park?

Perhaps unsurprisingly given national media attention, problems in this area elicited most comments (48² respondents).

53% of respondents stated the charge was in the range £2.50-5.00. 24% paid less than this. Some 8% paid more than £10.

The cost of parking was a concern for many respondents, with over a quarter of comments relating to difficulties finding parking spaces at the major hospitals, a source of great frustration. Actual cost of parking was the most frequent complaint, but paying for time spent waiting to be seen was a great irritation. The structure of charges varies between hospitals with some appearing more equitable than others. General comments questioned the principle of charging for hospital parking.

Not all was negative however. Where free parking was available it was appreciated, and can affect choice of hospital where this is an option. The direct linkage between hospital, town and transport nodes provided by the 'Park and Ride' at Treliiske was welcomed.

Has cost ever stopped you going to hospital?

Of our 411 respondents, 35 stated that cost had stopped them attending as a patient. 28 reported not accompanying someone because of cost, 67 said it had stopped them visiting a family member, and 48 from visiting a friend.

It is of concern that anyone should find cost a barrier to attending a hospital appointment.

² 50%

PROPOSALS

1. CAB Cornwall (CABC) offers to consult with Cornwall Council and assist with reviews of public transport provision.
2. CABC suggests to Primary Care Trusts and the Strategic Health Authority a review of the effectiveness of the Hospital Transport Costs Scheme and offers to assist in publicising and explaining the service.
3. CABC suggests Hospital Trusts exchange ideas on parking charges and access to Park and Ride facilities.
4. CABC offers to run information seminars for hospital staff about the possible impacts of a hospital appointment/stay on patients' lives.
5. CABC will continue to monitor this topic and repeat the survey at intervals.

Acknowledgements

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All volunteers for distributing and collecting the questionnaires

Particularly Chris Norbury CAB Cornwall (north Cornwall) for her work collating and analysing the results.

Enquiries

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Outline, free source, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cornwall_map_small.png

“Having an Emergency hospital over 30 miles away is annoying.”

“What I object to is having to pay for 4 hours when you only need 1 hour.”

“Even though helped (benefits) I still have to pay in advance. The added worry does nothing to make the visit easy (i.e. parking & costs)”

“My husband is on incapacity benefit and we are ineligible for help even though his condition requires frequent hospital visits.”

“If it was not for the goodwill of family members and friends I would find it very difficult to go to the hospital.”

“Insufficient parking, expensive to park, being late for appointments because of inadequate parking.”

“Travel costs of each journey was around £7.68 which caused hardship for that week’s finances.”

“Not being able to afford the £60+ of T.A.P. charges for two trips to Truro, there & back has meant that I have not been getting the support I need to manage my illness.”

NB Almost a quarter of survey returns included personal comments. The statements on the cover of this report are quotations from those comments.