

BRIEFING PAPER: Car Parking at Cancer Treatment Centres

Goal

Ensure that cancer treatment patients have access to affordable parking close to treatment.

Problem

Struggling to afford, or even find, a car park at a health facility is a familiar problem for many people, but for cancer patients and their carers it presents even greater challenges. Car parking is one of cancer patients' biggest unmet practical needs and they are concerned about the high cost of parking, difficulty finding a park, and long distances from the car park to the treatment centre.¹ The expected lifetime financial cost of cancer, which includes a reduction in income and an increase in out-of-pocket expenses, is \$47,200 per household.² This means that paying for car parking five days per week for 6-8 weeks while going through treatment can be very stressful. For cancer patients suffering from side effects, such as exhaustion and nausea, finding a park and walking long distances is difficult. Cancer Council NSW has received reports that some patients are being left alone at the hospital entrance as their carer drives around to find a park, which is an added stress for all concerned.

There is no consistency in car parking policies at health facilities and fees vary between local health districts (LHDs) and may even vary within an LHD. Information about parking options, and the eligibility criteria, is often confusing and/or poorly communicated.

Policy Context

The NSW Ministry of Health has acknowledged that there are wide variations and inconsistencies in car parking fees within health facilities.³ There is no overarching policy that applies to all hospitals and parking fees are influenced by various policies and arrangements including:

- *Hospital Car Parking Fees Policy: Campuses which are subject to car parking development* which is current until September 2018.³ This policy applies to Sydney metropolitan hospitals, and Gosford, Wyong and Wollongong hospitals, where there has been a significant car park redevelopment or there is a plan for one. Fees are site-specific, linked to the market rate and increased yearly in line with inflation. Examples of variations include Gosford which charges no more than \$5 a day, whereas Wollongong charges close to \$19 a day which is the maximum daily charge allowed under the policy. Concessions are available to eligible patients, for example those receiving ongoing cancer treatment, when they are parked in a designated car park that has a gate. Concession rates range from free for the first three hours up to \$21 for a multiple entry ticket that lasts for seven days. However if there are no spaces left in the designated car park cancer treatment patients will be required to go to the public car park and pay accordingly.

Some hospitals governed by this policy provide free car parking for cancer treatment patients. This includes three hospitals within the Sydney West Cancer Network: Blacktown Oncology Unit at Blacktown Hospital which has 20 spaces; the Nepean Cancer Care Centre at Nepean Hospital which has 35 spaces and the Crown Princess Mary Cancer Centre at Westmead Hospital which has 30 spaces.⁴ Wollongong Hospital has also developed local arrangements for oncology day centre patients. Those having a procedure (e.g. radiotherapy) of less than

two and half hours can access a small car park attached to the centre, and those having a treatment (e.g. chemotherapy) that lasts longer can access 11 spaces in a gated area in the public car park. Both arrangements are free.

- *Existing commercial or public private partnership (PPP) car parking contracts* – which have agreed fee structures and concessional arrangements. Mostly signed in the 1990s they will continue unless a car park redevelopment is planned for the hospital. Examples include: Royal North Shore Hospital; Prince of Wales; St George Hospital; Canterbury Hospital and Liverpool Hospital. The maximum rates under these arrangements range from \$18 a day at Canterbury Hospital to more than \$33 a day at Royal North Shore Hospital.^{5:6} Under these arrangements there are concession rates but none specifically for cancer treatment patients.

If a hospital doesn't fall into the above categories car parking fees are determined by the LHD.

Solution

For the duration of their treatment cancer patients need free, designated parking spaces close to the treatment centre, examples of which are provided by Sydney West Cancer Network. Where the infrastructure of a treatment facility doesn't allow for designated spaces alternative solutions are needed to ensure easy access. For example; free valet parking or free designated spaces in the public car park with a transit lounge and shuttle bus.

New patients should be provided with a language appropriate handout about the car parking policy and procedure at their treatment centre prior to their first appointment, and changes to procedures should be communicated to all existing and returning patients.

Action

Cancer Council NSW recommends that:

- Each LHD's Chief Executive Officer develop a car parking policy that ensures easy access for cancer treatment patients to designated free spaces for the duration of their treatment.

References

- (1) Cancer Council NSW. Car parking for cancer patients in New South Wales. Sydney: Cancer Council NSW; 2012 Jun.
- (2) Access Economics. Cost of cancer in NSW. Sydney: Access Economics for Cancer Council NSW; 2007 Apr.
- (3) NSW Ministry of Health. Hospital car parking fees policy: campuses which are subject to car parking development PD2013_031. 2013 September 20 [cited 2016 Mar 17]; Available from: http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2013/pdf/PD2013_031.pdf
- (4) NSW Health. The Crown Princess Mary Cancer Centre Westmead patient parking handout. 2013 [cited 2016 Mar 17]; Available from: <http://www.sydneywestcancer.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Parking-handout-complete.pdf>
- (5) Wilson Parking. Royal North Shore Hospital Car Park - parking fees. 2016 [cited 2016 Mar 17]; Available from: https://www.wilsonparking.com.au/park/2170_royal-north-shore-hospital-car-park_reserve-road-st-leonards
- (6) Metro Parking. Canterbury Hospital - car parking fees. 2015 [cited 2016 Mar 17]; Available from: <http://www.metroparking.com.au/cms-new-south-wales/canterbury-hospital.phps>