

Park the Charges

Briefing

December 2019



Background

What is often forgotten when speaking about the life-changing impact of a cancer diagnosis, is the financial toll it can take on individuals and families, which, for some, can be as stressful as a diagnosis itself.

The Irish Cancer Society's "Real Cost of Cancer"¹ report, published in November highlighted the broad range of costs not immediately apparent until someone receives their diagnosis.

Overall the cost of cancer is immense and we have made a conservative estimate that it costs €756 per month, rising to over €1,000 in some cases. This is discounting the monthly drop in income of over €1,500 faced by cancer patients.

Among the highest expenses for cancer patients were costs incurred during treatment. One of the largest such expenses was car parking, at an average of €64 a month for the 83% of cancer patients who had to pay them during treatment, and we receive regular queries on car parking from concerned patients visiting our Daffodil Centres at hospitals across the country and through our Cancer Nurseline.

The Real Cost of Car Parking

The Irish Cancer Society wants the HSE to examine ways to reduce the financial toll on cancer patients so they can focus on managing their treatment and recovery. Providing free car parking would make a real and immediate financial improvement to cancer patients and their families.

These are the kind of additional charges that no one thinks about when they first hear the words "you have cancer", but which can quickly take their toll when you're struggling to deal with huge additional outgoings and a big fall in income. This is especially true for those who are required to travel long distances for treatment and appointments, which require significant expenses on child-minding, travel and accommodation before reaching the hospital.

What have we been campaigning for?

We want the HSE to issue guidelines to hospitals to start providing free parking for patients undergoing cancer treatment. In 2016, the Irish Cancer Society wrote to all seven Hospital Groups and private parking operators to ask that cancer patients and their families are treated with compassion and care when dealing with the issue of car parking.

While car parking charges are a key source of revenue for many hospitals, it is clear that excessive rates are being charged at a number of hospitals. This puts an unnecessary pressure on cancer patients and their families, along with many other chronic disease groups and long-term patients. The Irish Cancer Society would like the HSE to work with hospitals to find alternative revenue sources other than hard-pressed cancer patients, and **would suggest that consideration is given to supplying central HSE funding in the Annual Services Plan to bridge any shortfall which may occur as a result of changes in parking policy.**

The Irish Cancer Society believes that, if adopted, the following set of guidelines would ensure a fair and transparent policy on car parking for cancer patients and their families. Currently, there is no national

policy on parking, aside from the setting of maximum daily rates, which is at the discretion of individual hospitals.

Proposed guidelines

- Patients undergoing cancer treatment should receive free or significantly reduced car parking;
- Patients should be informed of parking exemptions in their first appointment letter;
- Concessions should be widely promoted and easy to understand and apply for;
- Responsibility for informing cancer patients about their rights should rest with a specific member of staff;
- Healthcare professionals should be made aware of free parking schemes/concessions;
- Any future tender arrangements for private car park operators should clearly place the onus on operators to provide discs or tokens for cancer patients;
- Charges should be displayed clearly and well publicised at car park entrances and wherever payment is made, along with on the hospitals website;
- Any concessions should also be clearly advertised;
 - Transparency in parking charges should be encouraged. Hospitals must publish car parking costs, revenue raised from car parks, the use of that revenue and tenders/contracts with car park operators publicly;
- Weekly caps on charges should be introduced to protect regular patients and visitors.

The Irish Cancer Society is campaigning not only for fairness in pricing, but transparency. We have found that at many hospitals, in patient literature and on hospital websites, there is a dearth of information with regard to parking charges. A 2010 paper by the Centre for Health Economics at the University of York² on the impact of hospital car parking costs concluded that the stress caused by hospital parking is largely avoidable.

It suggested that providing “clear and easily accessible information on parking charges and policy, sources of financial support and the availability of permits or season tickets for regular users” would help reduce the level of stress experienced by patients, and we are fully supportive of these principles.

Positive examples

There are already a number of positive examples of car parking policies both at Irish hospitals and in other jurisdictions, where free parking is provided to long-stay patients and patients with chronic conditions.

A number of the twenty-six hospitals that provide cancer treatment offer concessions or free parking to cancer patients or regular visitors.

Survey of car parking at hospitals undertaken on the week of 17 June 2019

Hospitals that offer free parking for cancer patients	Hospitals that offer concessions	No free parking or concessions for cancer patients
Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore	St. James' Hospital (€5 per day)	Waterford Regional
St. Luke's, Rathgar	Our Lady of Lourdes, Drogheda (€4 per day)	Tallaght
Letterkenny General	St. Vincent's Hospital (half price)	Beaumont
Mayo General	Cork UH (€5 per week)	Cavan-Monaghan
Portiuncula	South Infirmary Victoria (€5 per day)	Sligo Regional
UH Limerick	Our Lady's, Crumlin (For long stay inpatients, after a charge of €36 per week for the first week, a reduced rate of €10 per week can be availed of)	Galway UH (limited free parking for radiotherapy only)
St. Luke's, Kilkenny		Mercy UH
Wexford GH		Mater Hospital
Kerry GH		
Connolly Hospital Naas GH South Tipperary		

We welcome the good work these hospitals have been doing in lightening the load for cancer patients and believe the compassion and care shown by them should be consistent across all hospitals providing cancer treatment.

We suggest that as part of its review process, the HSE examine existing policy at its hospitals to develop and identify best practice which can inform national policy and to reduce the administrative burden on both hospitals, and most importantly, patients, pending the outcome and recommendations of the review.

Outside of Ireland, there has been a significant push to reduce car parking charges in recent years, and currently:

- In Wales, hospital parking has been free since April 2008, except where Health Boards have external contracts in place. By 2011 most hospitals in Wales had stopped charging for car parking.
- In Northern Ireland, parking is free for chemotherapy and radiotherapy patients
- In Scotland³, parking is free except for at three private finance initiative hospitals in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The NHS in 2015 also published a [set of principles](#) around hospital parking, which would believe offer a solid basis for good practice that could be replicated in Ireland.

Progress to date

The Irish Cancer Society's 'Park the Charges' report⁴ and campaign has generated strong public support, with close to 4,000 signatures to an online petition.

The Society has raised awareness of the issue at a local level and has encouraged Councillors across fifteen local authority areas, where constituents are especially impacted by the charges, to encourage them to support this campaign. A number of local authorities have passed motions calling on their local hospitals, who have the authority to make a positive change, to offer free parking to cancer patients, while the matter has been raised frequently at HSE Regional Fora.

Following a submission from Cork City Council, the South Infirmary Victoria Hospital has reduced its parking rates for cancer patients undergoing treatment to a maximum of €5 per day, while the Chief Operating Officer of the HSE South/South West Hospital Group promised a review of parking policy within the Group.

Since September 2017, three further hospitals have also introduced more favourable parking arrangements for cancer patients. Both South Tipperary General Hospital and Naas General Hospital have introduced free parking for cancer patients while Cork University Hospital has improved its concession rate. The previous concession rate for cancer patients at Cork University Hospital was €5 per day. Now, those undergoing treatment pay €5 per week.

This momentum has helped instigate further changes at other hospitals, where we have seen greater transparency in the advertising of charges.

On **March 16 2018**, Minister Simon Harris ordered a national review of hospital car parking charges, which we warmly welcomed after almost a year and half campaigning on this issue.

The Minister specifically referenced the efforts of the Society in announcing the review and we welcome the opportunity to engage with the HSE to find solutions which take into account the needs of patients who are required to regularly visit our hospitals for cancer treatment.

Draft guidelines

In **November 2018**, large extracts of a draft report on hospital car parking charges were published in a number of media outlets, and the Minister for Health committed to their publication and implementation in 2019. It is estimated that implementation of these guidelines will cost in the region of €4 – 5 million to fund.

While we broadly welcomed these guidelines, we also have some **concerns**:

- Recommendations regarding multi-entry passes on consecutive days do not take account of the practicalities that many cancer patients' treatment does not occur on consecutive days. **As such, serious consideration should be given to passes for use over an extended period of time, especially for long-term or frequent visitors, such as cancer patients, and that these should either be available free of charge or at a small nominal fee.**
- Informal arrangements exist at some hospitals where particular patient groups, e.g. cancer patients, are offered free or reduced parking rates. **These arrangements should be more widely advertised to offer maximum benefits to all patients.**
- Furthermore, **individual hospitals offering these arrangements should receive assurances that wider advertisements of these rates will not impact their ability to continue to offer such rates.**
- Lastly, **a central register for car parking prices at hospitals across the country, including information about free or reduced rates, should be published.**

The Society believes that an overarching national policy on car parking needs to be put in place by the next Government, so that cancer patients and families around the country can feel the full benefit of a new parking policy.

For more information on the Irish Cancer Society's 'Park the Charges' campaign, please contact:

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¹ Irish Cancer Society – Kantar (2019), The Real Cost of Cancer

https://www.cancer.ie/sites/default/files/content-attachments/real_cost_of_cancer_2019_report.pdf

² A.R. Mason, 2010, 'Hospital Car Parking: The Impact of Access Costs', The University of York.

https://www.york.ac.uk/media/che/documents/papers/researchpapers/CHERP59_hospital_car_parking.pdf

³ House of Commons (2018), Debate pack, Hospital car parking charges.

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2018-0026/CDP-2018-0026.pdf>

⁴ Irish Cancer Society (2016), Park the Charges Campaign Report

<https://www.cancer.ie/advocacy/current-campaigns/park-the-charges>