

Hospital Parking Impacting Patients and Families

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Background

High parking fees at hospitals and clinics across B.C. lead to challenges and frustrations for patients, families and healthcare providers. Through ARNBC's engagement with nurses and patients/families, high hospital parking fees and the associated lack of reserved parking spaces for patients and healthcare providers other than physicians, has been consistently identified as a key issue.

For many patients with chronic illnesses or complex health conditions that require multiple hospital visits per month, these costs can cause undue financial hardship and may deter patients from seeking necessary care. There have been many stories reported in the media illustrating the devastating effects of high parking fees at many B.C. hospitals. For example, a cancer patient paying in excess of \$300 in parking fees in addition to parking tickets received during radiation treatment,¹ or a senior paying close to \$2,000 in hospital parking fees when visiting her family members who were receiving end-of-life care.²

Patients also struggle to understand why the parking spaces in front of the emergency and acute centres in many B.C. hospitals are reserved for physicians (who would be seemingly healthy), while patients must park several blocks away, regardless of their physical limitations.

In addition to issues of high cost and a lack of reserved spaces, the lack of alternate payment methods (i.e., other than credit cards) further adds onto existing challenges. As a result, patients who have impaired functional mobility or lack the required payment methods are often deterred from attending necessary appointments. Further, nurses understand that a key aspect of patient centred care involves the ability to support the needs of patients' families and friends. However, nursing knows that family members of patients staying in hospital for longer durations also suffer because high fees may inhibit their ability to visit loved ones as needed.

This issue is not unique to B.C., and to mitigate these many challenges, some jurisdictions across Canada have implemented policies to improve access to hospital services for patients and families. Currently in B.C., the municipalities of Delta and Mission have implemented municipal by-laws that prohibit paid parking in hospitals. In Ontario, the Health Minister has implemented a 50% discount for long term hospital stays, as well as a three year rate freeze.³ Prince Edward Island (PEI) also recently saw the elimination of parking fees from all island hospitals in early July 2016.⁴

Other advocates such as the Canadian Medical Association argue that mandatory hospital parking fees in hospitals contravene the primary objective of the Canada Health Act which is to "facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers."⁵ Nurses know that patients living with complex and life-threatening conditions are already under significant trauma and

1 CBC News British Columbia. (2015). *Hospital parking costs a barrier to health care, says patient advocate.*

2 CBC News British Columbia. (2013). *Richmond widow racks up \$1,800 hospital parking bill.*

3 CBC News Toronto. (2016). *Ontario freezes hospital parking rates, offers long-term discount.*

4 CBC News Prince Edward Island. (2016). *Queen Elizabeth Hospital in P.E.I. to eliminate parking fees.*

5 Health Canada. (2010). *Canada Health Act.*



Issues Brief

stress, and additional stressors such as high parking fees, lack of alternate payment methods and lack of close parking spots, must be addressed. Looking at other jurisdictions as positive examples, B.C. hospitals must tackle the current issues in hospital parking in order to ensure that life-saving appointments can be properly attended with ease, and family members are able to care for their loved ones without financial hardship.

Key Messages:

- B.C. nurses understand the challenges that patients face when accessing health care services, as parking fees has been identified as an important issue to address.
- Patients and families experience significant stress and trauma related to their medical conditions. However, from assessing patients' stressors, nurses are aware that in many instances, patients become more concerned with issues in parking than the medical condition that brought them to the hospital.
- Nurses are well positioned to address and advocate for changes to the current parking fees, payment methods and reserved parking spots for patients among B.C. hospitals.
- High parking fees, lack of reserved parking spaces for patients, and lack of alternate payment methods are causing undue financial hardship and inaccessibility, all of which compromise the health and well-being of patient and their families.
- Mandatory hospital parking fees contravene the Canada Health Act which states that hospitals should "facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers."
- Several jurisdictions within and outside of B.C. have implemented policies to either reduce, freeze or eliminate parking fees. Many of these policies can be explored and replicated within this province.

Questions for Nurses:

1. What solutions could be implemented by B.C. hospitals?
2. Who are the key stakeholders that should be aware of this issue?
3. How can ARNBC help with this issue?

