FOI 3382

Date 09/12/2024

Dear Requester,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request. Please note, this is a cross-site response for Bedford site and Luton site.

You asked:

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| **Request** | **Bedford** |
| **1.Did the Trust pay Wheelshare to install these wheelchairs? or did Wheelshare pay for installation itself?  If the former, how much?** | The Trust paid £9600 to supply & install the wheelchairs at the Main Entrance. |
| **2. Does the Trust pay Wheelshare an ongoing fee for the wheelchairs to be present, or a service fee of any kind?  Is so, how much?** | Annual fee of £8K + VAT |
| **3. Does the Trust pay Wheelshare for the first 5 hours of use?  If so, is this at the same rate as the rate patients pay after 5 hours?  If not, how much and does the trust subsidise patient use?** | Nothing paid by the Trust for the first 5 hours. They are called Hospital portering chairs. |
| **4. Prior to the installation of these Wheelchairs, what were the provisions for patients requiring wheelchairs? Namely, were they provided by a private company, or by the trust and were their fees involved?** | The Trust provided (loose) wheelchairs at the entrances at a cost of £174 each. As these were not securable, they would regularly be removed from site, and have to be replaced 2-3 times per year. |
| **5. In light of the above questions, what is the estimated cost as lump sum and/or annual cost of installing these wheelchairs? Or is there an expected saving? The previously provided wheelchairs.** | See previous answer. There will be a long term saving on the cost of purchasing new portering chairs, but the biggest benefit of the newly provided wheelchairs is the availability of them in one place, as users have to return them to the base station. They are regularly serviced and maintained by the supplying company and are a larger and more comfortable chair with better handling. The main reason for providing these chairs is for the better patient experience. This also releases staff time, as staff would often be approached by visitors trying to locate a wheelchair who needed assistance. |
| **6. What consultation was made with staff and patients groups prior to the installation?** | Staff groups were consulted and happy with the offer as it gives a better patient experience. Public Governors consulted and they too were very keen on the new offer. |
| **7. What impact assessment was made of how this would affect patients? (for example, who may find themselves trapped in a wheelchair that is costing them money having been stuck waiting for treatment beyond 5 hours?)** | The ‘Hirers’ of these wheelchairs receive text message updates as the free five hours is coming to an end to enable them time to return the chair or to seek an alternative within the department they are visiting. If a user chooses to retain the chair for use beyond the five hour period, they would then be charged a small hourly fee. The average use period of these chairs is 2.2 hours at a time. |
| **8. What impact assessment was made of how the above would affect staff and their ability to do their jobs?** | Our intention is that the scheme releases staff time for caring, as under the old arrangements staff would often be approached by visitors trying to locate a wheelchair who needed assistance. Whilst it is recognised that patients who are worried about the free loan period expiring may approach staff for support, most visitors who attend without their own wheelchair are accompanied, and overall the benefits of improved comfort and accessibility for those who need this facility were assessed to outweigh any disadvantages. |

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If you are not satisfied with the Trust review under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you may apply directly to the Information Commissioners Officer (ICO) for a review of your appeal decision. The ICO can be contacted at: ICO, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF www.ico.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

*FOI Officer*

Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust