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11 February 2015

FROM THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Hugh McCaughey
Chief Executive
SEHSCT
Trust HQ
Ulster Hospital
Dundonald
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Dear Sir,

CONSULTATION ON THE EXTENSION OF TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT ACROSS SOUTH EASTERN TRUST HOSPITAL SITES

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland representing nearly 12,000 farming families. The UFU represents farmers and their families from all areas of Northern Ireland and across all sectors.

The intention to "introduce a charge, at an appropriate level for car parking, across the Ards Hospital, Lagan Valley Hospital and the Downe/Downshire Hospital sites at a rate consistent with the Ulster Hospital for staff and members of the public" does give us some cause for concern. The hospitals in which it is proposed to introduce these charges provide services for a much more rural community than does the Ulster Hospital, therefore we believe that some changes need to be made should the Trust feel it is necessary to introduce car parking charges.

In particular, we would request that the partners or next-of-kin of long-stay patients should be granted free car parking. Currently this is left "discretionary" and we think it would be absolutely unacceptable for someone to have to pay to visit their long-stay loved one in hospital. I would remind you of the point that the catchment areas of these hospitals is rural and therefore the partners of these patients are much less likely to live within walking distance of the hospital and public transport is unreliable at best in rural areas. Many of these people will be making the journey every day to see their loved one, and a car parking charge could therefore potentially run into a significant amount of money. We would urge the Trust to reconsider this decision and take the views of relatives into consideration.

As well as this, we would welcome clarification on what "discretionary" means. We are quite concerned that this could lead to free parking being provided one day, but not the next as a different person may be making the decision. People need to be know whether they will have to pay for car parking, and who they need to speak to within the hospital structure to get an answer. There is also some confusion around the definition of "long-stay" patients, as it appears that different hospitals operate different policies with regard to the length of time required to qualify for this.

I trust our comments will be given full consideration but should you wish to query any comments raised please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barclay Bell', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

BARCLAY BELL