

Patient and visitor travel

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Patients and visitors account for a significant proportion of the total number of trips to NHS sites. Consequently, Trusts are likely to need to address patient and visitor transport as part of their travel plan. Possible motivations for taking steps to manage patient and visitor travel include:

- Reducing the cost of non-emergency patient transport services.
- Improving accessibility for patients, including those who need to travel in private vehicles.
- Increasing the number of patients and visitors who reach the site by alternative modes, for those who are not physically reliant on using private vehicles.

7.1 Patient and visitor surveys

As with staff travel, the starting point for addressing patient and visitor travel is to gather information about their travel patterns and the problems they encounter in reaching their final destination. To gather such information a patient and visitor travel survey should be undertaken. This will help to find out:


- How patients and visitors currently travel to and from the Trust's sites, why they choose to travel the way they do and what problems they encounter.
- Where patients and visitors are travelling from.
- Whether patients and visitors would be willing/able to change their travel behaviour in favour of more sustainable modes.

The best method for disseminating the survey and for gathering completed questionnaires will vary depending upon the size, nature and set up of the Trust. The following approaches could be used:

- Handing out questionnaires from a main reception desk or handing out questionnaires from reception points in wards and clinics.
- Using surveyors to go through the questionnaire with patients and visitors in the main entrance and waiting areas.
- Distributing questionnaires with appointment confirmations.
- A combination of some or all of the above.

As with the staff travel survey, when designing the questionnaire a number of points should be considered:

- The likelihood of 'multi-stage' journeys.
- The questionnaire should be relatively short—no more than two sides is recommended.
- The layout of the questionnaire should be clear and questions should be ordered logically with unambiguous wording—this is particularly important if the questionnaires will be handed out to patients and visitors for completion, rather than a surveyor asking the questions.
- Keep open-ended questions to a minimum.
- Undertake a pilot survey amongst 4 or 5 patients and visitors to make sure the questionnaire works.

A patient and visitor survey questionnaire used by University College London Hospitals NHS Trust is provided in Appendix 7A . It may be used as a template although questions should be tailored to the specific circumstances and needs of each individual Trust.

Information from the travel survey could be supplemented with information from other sources, for example, data on the number of 'Did Not Attend' (patients failing to keep an appointment) or data from patient satisfaction surveys.

7.2 Addressing patient and visitor travel as part of the travel plan

Possible areas for addressing patient and visitor travel as part of the travel plan include:

- Reviewing the provision of non-emergency patient transport.
- Reviewing the availability and provision of parking for patients and visitors.
- Promoting the use of alternatives to car travel.

Further detail on these aspects is provided below.

7.3 Non-Emergency Patient Transport

Most Trusts have an obligation to offer a Non Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPT) to certain patients who, due to their medical condition, are unable to make their own travel arrangements. The demand for, and the costs of NEPT can be managed by:

- Reviewing the eligibility criteria used to assess whether a patient qualifies for NEPT. The eligibility criteria can sometimes be ambiguous, misinterpreted

or even abused, resulting in some patients receiving transport who arguably do not need it.

- Communicating the importance of sticking to the strict eligibility criteria to the Medical and Clinical Staff responsible for allocating NEPT to patients.
- Generating greater accountability by devolving management of the NEPT budget to individual departments.
- Offering a free parking space to patients who are eligible for NEPT but who can arrange their own transport for getting to the Trust.

7.4 Parking provision for patients and visitors

For Trusts that provide parking for patients and visitors, options exist for managing the demand and provision of this parking within the context of the overall car parking policy. For example:

- Parking charges for patients and visitors can be increased to reduce the demand for parking and help to promote the use of alternative modes.
- Specialist patient/visitor parking can be provided for disabled patients/visitors, long stay patients and frequent attendees.
- Lower or zero charges can be introduced for specific groups.

For Trusts with limited or no parking for patients and visitors, the following actions could be taken to address accessibility issues for disabled patients and visitors:

- Review the arrangements for patient drop off and pick up.

- Review the availability of disabled parking close to the site and if more is required approach the local authority to discuss options.

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Hospitals NHS Trust, through their travel plan partnership with the London Borough of Camden, have become aware of and have begun to make use of the Council's permit scheme that enables blue badge holders to apply for a temporary parking permit in the borough's green badge area when attending hospital appointments. To apply, applicants must write in advance, sending a copy of their appointment letter or card, a copy of their blue badge and a copy of their vehicle registration document. Patients who receive regular treatment can apply for a permit valid for two months.

- Review the processes for ensuring that travel information is provided to patients in advance through the appointment system.
- Improve pedestrian signage to the site from local train and underground stations.
- Promote the health benefits of walking and cycling to further encourage sustainable travel to sites. This could be achieved via posters in clinics and surgeries and by encouraging health practitioners to recommend walking and cycling to their patients to encourage healthy lifestyles.

Eastman Dental Hospital produced an information leaflet aimed specifically at patients and visitors who were attending the Hospital from locations all over the UK (see Appendix 7B ).

University College London hospitals NHS Trust (UCLH) provided improved pedestrian signage to its sites in conjunction with Camden Council.

As part of the relocation of a Health Centre in Oxford, **Oxford City Primary Care Trust** proposed provision of 'Way Finder' sessions to elderly patients to show them how to get to the new health centre by public transport and walking from where they live. Patients will also be shown around the new facility so that they are familiar with the new health services on offer. This exercise will be undertaken in conjunction with Age Concern and the local bus companies.

7.5 Promoting alternative modes to patients and visitors

A number of measures identified for improving staff travel, for example, improving public transport provision, providing better public transport information on the website, and improved pedestrian signage, will also benefit patients and visitors.

The following measures should also be considered to further promote the use of alternatives by patients and visitors:

- Produce travel leaflets showing detailed information about public transport walking and cycling routes to each of the Trust's sites and include this information on the Trust's internet site.