

The Wokingham Volunteer Centre

Report on Royal Berkshire Hospital parking passes trial for volunteer drivers

July 2017

A response to this report has been received from the voluntary services manager at Royal Berkshire Hospital and those responses have been included in this report in RED

Background

Every single working day, including some weekends, the selfless and dedicated volunteer drivers of the Wokingham Transport Scheme drive vulnerable elderly residents to appointments at the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH). Every working day we send up to 6 or so drivers, many of whom do this trip several times a week, helping very frail elderly people with varying medical needs and the majority needing physical and emotional support.

Parking at the RBH, or the lack of it, causes major stress to the volunteer drivers from all the various community transport schemes that do their best to help elderly and/or disabled vulnerable people attend their appointments. Many of our drivers reach a point where they cannot cope with the stress. We then lose great volunteers and our service users lose support. Surely, as we are talking about such small numbers, it should not be beyond the wit of man to be able to come up with a solution to make life easier for this band of committed volunteers who help those who cannot help themselves and who have no one else to ask.

Over recent years, many conversations, face to face and/or by email, have taken place with representatives of RBH, University of Reading, Healthwatch, the Wokingham Transport Scheme and some patient groups, on the subject of parking.

For the record, previous suggestions from the Wokingham Transport Scheme have included:

- (1) Allowing suitably badged volunteer drivers from the various car schemes to use the vastly underused 6th floor of the multi-storey car park;
- (2) Allowing suitably badged volunteer drivers to use underused areas of university parking;
- (3) Introducing a new volunteer role at RBH (in addition to the meeters & greeters) along the lines of a meeter/chaperone who would wait at various designated drop off points to take elderly or vulnerable patients, dropped off when their volunteer drivers cannot park, to the department for their appointment (volunteer driver meets them there later once parked).

We have had no feedback on (1) and (3); the Vice Chancellor of the University insists that there is no spare capacity on university grounds (2).

As a result of ongoing attempts to initiate discussions, Roger Kemp of Healthwatch and a volunteer driver from Wokingham negotiated for a trial period six badges allowing access to two spaces, designated as volunteer parking, in the mainly staff car park adjacent to Outpatients 2/South Block.

The trial began in 2015 and was initially to run for 6 months. The six passes were allocated to the Volunteer Centre, which were then given to the drivers who volunteer for RBH trips most often. It

has in fact run quite satisfactorily since then. On our previous enquiries to the facilities team at RBH to request more badges, we were told that the trial was still running.

Results of the trial

In total, our drivers made 756 trips to RBH in 2015-16, increasing to 797 in 2016-17. Several of our drivers are unable to cope with the RBH as a result of parking issues. The six drivers with passes, who represent 11% of our total drivers, accounted for around 40% of the RBH drives in this period.

The two designated spaces have made a huge difference to volunteers drivers (see comments below). However our drivers are now unable to use them very often as staff from certain departments are advising their patients to park there. Various vehicles that don't have passes would appear to be accessing the area via a road way marked 'No Entry'. 'Policing' of the area is variable although some unauthorised users have apparently been ticketed by the parking attendant. In fact on one occasion he telephoned the Volunteer Centre to question the status of an unbadged car. On that occasion, our volunteer had forgotten his ID badge but we were able confirm that he was there officially and was assisting a service user.

Comments from our drivers

'The pass has changed the RBH experience for me – I have not used the multi-storey car park in over a year and it makes life so much easier for me and for the client.'

'The Passes are better than nothing but the two spaces outside South Block are usually occupied and I have been able to use them on less than half of the occasions that I have visited RBH.'

'It is possible to access these parking spaces without a pass.'

'Volunteer drivers face special issues [over and above those face by patients and their relatives]. Volunteers have a specific duty of care and responsibilities by dint of belonging to a publicly visible and accountable organisation. Secondly, we have to face these problems on a frequent and ongoing basis and stress builds up over a period of time.'

Conclusion

We would like to conclude with more constructive suggestions from our volunteers and include here previous suggestions which we feel have not been considered and represent simple and cost-free solutions to the parking problem.

(1) Introduce more designated drop-off points and some 20 minute wait volunteer spaces.

We have agreed with Peter that we will designate all the ambulance area bays in South Block next to the current two bays as volunteer driving spaces with 20 min wait times. I am getting some signs sorted on this. There are also three drop off spaces off West Drive behind the Berkshire Cancer Centre which we are going to put better signage on too. We then wanted to raise awareness of these spaces with the volunteer drivers and I wanted to get in touch with all the different organisations to tell them about this. We are looking through our records for details of these different organisations, but if you have any details, that would be really helpful if you could share them.

- (2) Extend the number of spaces available at the South Block, including the unused ambulance area.

See above

- (3) Allow suitably badged volunteer drivers from the various car schemes to use the vastly underused 6th floor of the multi-storey car park.

We are not going to do this at present but want to see how the other spaces go in alleviating the problem.

- (4) Introduce a new volunteer role at RBH (in addition to the meeters & greeters) along the lines of a meeter/chaperone who would wait at various designated drop off points (see (1) above) to take elderly or vulnerable patients, dropped off when their volunteer drivers cannot park, to the department for their appointment (the volunteer driver meets them there once parked).

I will look into what more we need on this but we are already exploring getting meeters and greeters at the Berkshire Cancer Centre, which would be a new role. I am also trying to get a phone installed at the South Block Outpatients welcome desk so people can call for the buggy service which should help from that end.

- (5) Supply a few more passes to Wokingham drivers – we are the single biggest car-based scheme in Wokingham with over 900 registered service users, all elderly and/or disabled.

We are investigating what we need to do about passes and will get back to you on this. How many drivers would need them if we did it for you and do you think you could carry on having a proportion of badges you share around rather than every driver having one?

- (6) Supply passes to drivers with other transport schemes.

I am trying to find out who these organisations are but if you have any names then let me know.

- (7) Use influence with University of Reading hierarchy to access some university parking.

I want to explore if there is somewhere where we can recommend for drivers to go to after they drop people off. Someone suggested Morrisons for example so I will try there along with any other ideas like the University. This is why it would be helpful for us to know how long people tend to have to wait once they have 'dropped' their patient. We ideally just need people to be dropped like you say for 20 mins but I know some have to wait longer for them rather than coming back for them later. How do you schedule them? Does one driver do one patient or could they pick someone up as well?

- (8) Extend the operating hours for the buggy scheme – RBH volunteers have told us that they would be happy to help for longer but their hours are dictated by RBH.

We are looking at all areas of our volunteers and the cover we have. What hours would you need it to operate?