

Patients Travel Expenses

Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board follows the NHS Travel Scheme to ensure that any patient travelling for treatment has equitable access to help with travel costs. Our local policy for all residents is as below:

1. All patients who are on low income or benefits as defined by the regulations are entitled to reimbursement of travelling expenses and are refunded at the local mileage rate or public transport costs. The rate for mileage is reviewed in line with HM Revenue & Customs rates.
2. All patients who are on low income and might be entitled to help apply using the HC1 form for assessment for help with travel costs. Application forms are available at the cash office or information desk at local hospitals.
3. Other patients who are not entitled to help via the scheme can apply for an ex-gratia payments. This is in line with the NHS Circular MEL(1996)70 where the Board can exercise discretion to reimburse travelling expenses for residents who do not qualify under the regulations. We exercise this discretion where either the distance or the frequency of travel means the patient is experiencing financial hardship because of meeting the expense of multiple out of region trips or where the referral is outside our normal tertiary referral route.

The scheme is for travel by the patient and does not cover expenses for visitors. We would consider family therapy sessions to be classed as part of the treatment costs and not simply visiting expenses.

The scheme does not cover visits home during a course of inpatient treatment, however we would take into account a range of factors, particularly representation from the consultant that it was important for the patient psychologically to get back to see their family.

Radiotherapy is not an inpatient treatment, each daily episode is a separate treatment and most patients have no option to stay in NHS care in between treatments. Travelling expenses are governed by the regulations but because of the numbers travelling we have a package that is a mixture of a contract with a taxi firm to run a minibus each Monday and Friday and voluntary sector bodies' assistance with accommodation and other travel.

Accommodation is not covered by the scheme but may be provided in some ex-gratia cases.

1. Regulations Low Income/Benefits

Entitlement to travelling expenses is covered by the national regulations contained in the NHS (Travelling Expenses and remission of Charges) (Scotland) (No 2) regulations 2003 (SI 2003 No 460) as updated annually for any changes in limits or allowances.

Under this, people on low income as defined by the regulations are entitled to reimbursement of “travelling expenses necessarily incurred or to be incurred by a person attending a hospital for the purposes of availing that person of services under the care of a hospital consultant (Para 3.3 of the regulations)”.

These regulations apply to all the Scottish NHS. Any Scottish patient on low income as defined by the regulations is entitled to have their travelling expenses reimbursed. There is further assistance available under the regulations for people living in areas covered by the Highlands and Islands Scheme. The Boards covering these areas received supplementary funding to cover this expanded scheme. Dumfries and Galloway is not one of the areas listed, so only the low income grounds apply under the regulations.

Where patients are entitled to travelling expenses and go through the cash office of the hospital in which they are receiving treatment, they will be reimbursed provided they can provide evidence of benefit. Boards will recharge the home Board for the travel costs they have reimbursed for our residents.

Alternatively, patients can complete an HC5 form and submit it for processing. We receive the authorised form and process promptly. Payment by cheque is sent directly to the patient.

2. Assessment for Entitlement

Any patients who wish to be assessed complete an HC1 form and submit it. Confirmation will be sent determining the level of support entitled to. Thereafter HC5 forms should be completed. Patients may be assessed as entitled in full or in part or between certain dates only.

The source regulations governing our approach are available for free on line viewing on the Office of Public sector information website <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/>

3. Ex-gratia payments

The NHS Circular MEL(1996)70 does allow Boards to exercise discretion and to reimburse travelling expenses where people do not qualify under the regulations.

We exercise this discretion where, although the patient's assessed income exceeds the limit, either the distance or the frequency of travel means the patient is experiencing financial hardship because of meeting the expense of multiple out of region trips.

In these circumstances, we make a contribution to cover the higher travel costs because we recognise that even though the person is not entitled under the regulations it is still a significant financial burden for them.

If Dumfries and Galloway patients are asking about help with travel costs and are not eligible through the scheme they are welcome to write to the Director of Finance explaining their circumstances and asking to be considered for an ex-gratia payment.

They should detail dates of trips, mileage or supply public transport receipts. They should also detail any benefits they are entitled to or give evidence of low family income. The Director of Finance will consider an ex-gratia payment, however it is not automatic.

Our policy is in effect the travelling expenses regulations but we do exercise discretion on individual cases where there are special factors. We are concerned about being consistent in exercising this discretion.

Examples:

1. Patient travelling to Glasgow or Edinburgh – not out with our usual referral route so no help given.
2. Patient in Neonatal in Dundee - pay difference in mileage between Glasgow (usual tertiary centre) and Dundee.
3. Patient travelling to London requiring overnight stay – pay most reasonable means of transport and accommodation, usually travel lodge/B&B.
4. Patient attending Glasgow or Edinburgh (usual tertiary centres) for a course of treatment requiring multiple journeys, more frequent than usually expected – pay due to frequency not distance.

The reimbursement rate for mileage is reviewed regularly in line with the HM Revenue & Customs rates. The current rate, effective from 1st September 2017, is 13p per mile.

**Finance Department
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