Hospital Parking Fees – did that touch a raw nerve!

An editorial in the November 28 issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal about excessive patient and visitor parking fees at hospitals has blown the lid off widespread frustration and anger at what many consider to be the unprincipled gouging of a captive market.

Who hasn’t felt outrage at being charged airport-style parking fees while performing a noble act like visiting the sick! Who hasn’t been struck by the profound irony of sometimes paying more for parking than for treatment!

One hospital lists its parking fees under the section Hospital Amenities and Services! At the end of their list of parking rates (which start at $4.00 for each ½ hour), they add the self-serving and hollow line, “We greatly appreciate the financial support we receive from parking rates that enable us to provide better health care.”

By contrast, an interesting insight that Rajendra Kale, the interim Editor-in-Chief of the CMAJ puts forward is that “Parking fees are a barrier to health care and add avoidable stress to patients who have enough to deal with. They can and sometimes do interfere with a clinical consultation, reducing the quality of the interaction and therefore of care. Almost every hospital doctor in Canada would be able to narrate anecdotes of patients being preoccupied with parking fees. Such distraction interferes with the clinical consultation. For example, some patients (who have often waited several weeks to see a doctor) try to end a consultation abruptly when they realize that they will have to pay for an additional hour of parking.”

He points out that these fees are incompatible with Canadian healthcare policy which is to provide “access to health services without financial or other barriers.” Put another way, this isn’t patient-centred healthcare, it’s parking-centred health care!

At the risk of also sounding self-serving, this is another advantage for homecare. Your own driveway is free... and you don’t need a role of toonies.