

BENENDEN - HOSPITAL VOLUNTARY CAR SERVICE

Since before March 2011 residents of Benenden and Iden Green, and the surrounding community, have had the advantage of a car service to take them to their local surgery, or hospital, or other medical facility. This service is to enable anyone (ie the patient) who has no access to a car nor to a relative with a car, nor a suitable bus service, to attend for a planned appointment: it is NOT an Emergency service.

The service comprises one or more (volunteer) Coordinators, whose telephone number(s) is advertised, and several (currently eleven) individual volunteers who may kindly agree to drive a patient using their own vehicle. All requests must be made verbally by phone. Both the Coordinators (who are also volunteer drivers) and the drivers are correctly described as Volunteers: they may undertake a task upon request but, having accepted, are still under no formal obligation to drive anyone, nor to do anything else in relation to the service. As unpaid volunteers they are under no formal contract and thus under no obligation beyond that of an agreement made in good faith.

The service provided is entirely voluntary. In order to avoid accounting but yet to work within the requirements of the HMRC, no charges are made nor are any accounts maintained by the Coordinator(s). But it is of course recognised that the costs of driving on this service must be addressed. A driver, after completing an agreed journey, may expect a donation to be made by the patient to him/her to cover the costs of fuel used and to address the basic running expenses of the vehicle. Such a donation is of course voluntary, must not exceed the actual cost of the journey and must be agreed between the driver and the patient. Usually it will be no more than £5 for a journey to a local surgery and a sum not exceeding £10 to any of the hospitals in the surrounding area. To this may be added the cost of parking at the surgery or hospital which may have had to be paid by the driver.

Note however that all drivers have an Identity Card issued by the Coordinator identifying them as Volunteers: this, presented at Reception at the main hospitals in the area (except Ashford), will procure cancellation of the parking charge. Note, however, that the parking ticket must be presented along with the driver's Identify Card, and that this must **not** be done until just before leaving the hospital because the cancellation lasts only for 10 minutes! After that the charge is automatically reinstated.

Under this scheme the Volunteer driver must be fully insured to drive the vehicle which must be fit for the road. The vehicle insurance must cover passengers as well as the driver. A feature of this Voluntary service is that every driver must have contacted his/her motor insurance company and confirmed with it that patients carried under the scheme to and from medical centres and hospital appointments are automatically covered. This should not present a problem.

The Coordinators, currently Peter and Gilly Walton, are looking for a person or a couple to take over from them soon. If you feel that you could make this kind of contribution to the community, please call 01580 242855 for a chat.

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