

News story: Recovering the cost of NHS treatments given to overseas visitors

New regulations requiring all hospitals to check upfront whether patients are eligible for free NHS treatment will be in place under plans to recover the cost of health treatments provided to patients not ordinarily resident in the UK.

Legal changes will require all hospitals to establish whether patients are eligible for free treatment, and to charge upfront those who are not eligible, for any non-urgent, planned care.

The law will change from April 2017 and this will play an important role in meeting the government's ambition to recover up to £500 million a year from overseas visitors who are not eligible for free care.

The new measures will also require hospitals and NHS bodies to identify and flag a patient's chargeable status so that other parts of the NHS can more easily recoup costs from overseas visitors wherever charges apply.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

We have no problem with overseas visitors using our NHS – as long as they make a fair contribution, just as the British taxpayer does.

So today we are announcing plans to change the law which means those who aren't eligible for free care will be asked to pay upfront for non-urgent treatment.

We aim to recover up to £500 million a year by the middle of this Parliament – money that can then be reinvested in patient care.

Stephen Graves, Chief Executive Officer at Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which piloted upfront charging for elective care, said:

Since implementing our policy, we have seen an improvement in our hospitals. The funds recouped are invested back into the system to benefit patients and our approach has not been to the detriment of the high quality patient care and patient experience we are able to provide.

There has not been any impact on the number of non-UK residents coming through the system for treatment but we do now identify non-eligible patients sooner, and at a higher volume than previously.

The government [consulted on extending charging rules to areas of NHS care](#) between December 2015 and March 2016. The consultation aimed to support the principle of fairness by making people who are not ordinarily resident in the UK pay for NHS care.

The government will provide support and guidance to the NHS so it can identify those not eligible for free care and address any challenges ahead of the implementation of new legal regulations.

NHS Improvement will also be working intensively over the coming months with trusts that have the most potential to recover costs.