



PRESS RELEASE

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GHA Management wishes to clarify the circumstances which led to the Minister for Health, Yvette Del Agua, parking her vehicle in a disabled parking bay within St Bernard's Hospital. The GHA disputes the GLDM's statement, which is clearly intended to give the erroneous impression that the Minister indiscriminately and habitually parks her car in disabled parking bays.

The first point to clarify, for the accuracy of the record, is that the disabled parking bay in question is not (contrary to the impression created) a public disabled parking bay.

St Bernard's Hospital has three disabled parking bays in its basement for the use of **disabled members of staff**. There is a policy in place which provides for disabled members of the public to park in the lay-bye at the front of the hospital. On one occasion, the Minister arrived at work to find that her allocated parking space in the hospital basement had been occupied by another vehicle. One of the hospital's security guards was already in the area trying to find out who that vehicle belonged to. The 3 disabled staff parking bays were all empty and she was asked by the security guard to park in one of them temporarily whilst he resolved the situation with her parking space. The Minister was reassured that she would be called down if the bay was required by a disabled member of staff. According to the security guard who was monitoring the situation, the other 2 disabled parking bays remained empty throughout the period, and no disabled member of staff required the use of the disabled parking bays whilst the Minister's car was temporarily parked in one of them.

Members of the public cannot access the hospital's basement unless they have an electronic pass to open the barrier [only issued to staff members], or are exceptionally given a permit to park there. Once inside, a valid parking permit needs to be displayed. GHA Management can categorically state that no member of the public conveying a disabled child to St Bernard's Hospital has had access to the basement during the period in question. It therefore finds it very difficult to give credibility to the events that have been described by the GLDM, including the GLDM's assertion that the photograph of the Minister's car was taken by a member of the public conveying a disabled child to hospital. The GHA now understands that the photograph was not taken by a member of the general public.

In answer to the Opposition's statement on the matter, the Minister for Health has said: "whilst I accept that parking in a spare disabled bay, even in these exceptional circumstances, can expose me to a degree of political criticism, the public reaction of the Opposition member, Neil Costa, is immature and as usual completely "over the top". Many of Gibraltar's disabled people are aware of my long-standing commitment to their interests. They will clearly recognise Mr Costa's accusation that I am selfish, that I have put my own comfort and interests before anyone else's, and that I have abused my power, as the intemperate and characteristic political opportunism that it is".