

Cuts force disabled patients to crowdfund wheelchairs

Disabled people are having to rely on crowdfunding to pay for wheelchairs, a doctor has warned.

Cuts in services, regional variations in availability and delays mean that patients have to raise funds online to buy the equipment they need.

Doctors at the British Medical Association's annual representative meeting in Bournemouth unanimously passed a motion calling for users to have "timely access to chairs suitable for their individual conditions".

Dr Hannah Barham-Brown, a junior doctor working in south London, said

that hundreds of patients were fundraising online. Standard NHS chairs weigh about 20kg and, for some patients, manoeuvring them could cause damage, she said.

Dr Barham-Brown, 29, who presented the motion, said: "I had to crowdfund my wheelchair halfway through medical school when I was told that it was going to cost around £2,000 to get this chair and the NHS were able to offer me a £140 voucher or a chair which was not remotely ergonomic.

"That was ultimately going to do me more harm than good so my best friend

set up a crowdfunding page for me and managed to raise £2,000 in 24 hours.

"NHS chairs are very heavy and very hard to manoeuvre. In terms of public transport I wouldn't be able to go anywhere in an NHS chair unless there was someone with me helping me. You need to be pushed.

"More and more I'm seeing on social media pleas from people begging for support to buy wheelchairs.

"The guidelines for getting chairs now are so strict, wheelchair services across the country are being privatised and it's just getting harder and harder to

get access. Muscular Dystrophy UK recently did a report on this and said that there seems to be a postcode lottery happening around the country. For example, my mother is also a wheelchair user with a different condition — she is based up in Newcastle and got her chair fully funded whereas I got £140 towards mine in London."

People using the Gofundme site to raise money for wheelchairs include a ten-year-old who has a genetic disorder, a stroke patient who wants to get back to work and an 11-year-old with cerebral palsy.

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