

The Great Accessible Parking Permit Fraud

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Probably the biggest single issue that causes annoyance among those of us with a spinal cord injury is parking, and I am not talking about the people who ignore the signs and park in accessible parking spots, because they are “only going to be there for a minute.” Oh sure, those people are a pain, and I wish them a quick and speedy passage to the darkest corner of hell, but it is another group who cause the biggest problem for those of us who need the extra room an accessible parking space provides, for transferring to and from our wheelchairs.

Able-bodied seniors.

Doctors seemingly sign parking permit application forms for anyone who asks for them, without taking a moment to ask themselves whether or not these people actually need an accessible parking spot. One of the rules of virtually every issuing authority is, that the applicant be unable to walk 100 metres (328 feet) without the need for a mobility aid (wheelchair, walker, crutches, cane.) If they don't need a mobility aid, they don't need the wider accessible parking stall.

Look in any large supermarket parking lot. Most days, you are lucky if there is a vacant accessible parking stall, yet when looking around the store, you would be hard pressed to find anywhere near that number of truly disabled customers. My wife and I often shop at a Costco, near our home. The disabled parking stalls are generally full, yet for a customer to walk from the parking lot to the back of the store, and then back to their car would be a trip of well over 100 metres, and that doesn't included going up and down the aisles in between the front and the rear of the store.

On a recent weekend afternoon, we were recently lucky enough to park in one of just 2 accessible parking stalls near a coffee shop we enjoy frequenting. While my wife struggled to unload my wheelchair from the car, the gentleman parked in the other accessible stall returned to his car. He was still wearing the participant number for the half-marathon he had just completed. That's just under 42,000 more metres more than the 100-meter limit for having an accessible parking permit, and yet, some doctor had signed the form, saying he needed the permit.

In any other instance signing that form would be considered fraud.

If the doctor would not be willing to participate in a fraud in an application for disability benefits, because he or she would be breaking the law, and could face criminal charges, they should be just as unwilling to commit fraud on a parking permit application. It may not result in charges, but it does take a certain degree of morality that may be lacking among some.

We cannot depend on the stores to enforce the parking permit rules. They are too afraid of offending customers who park without a parking permit by telling them that they can't park in an accessible spot 'for just a minute,' let alone someone who talked their doctor into signing the permit application.

We have to get this system changed. I believe that doctors are afraid to say no when someone asks them for a parking permit. They fear offending their patients, by forcing honesty into the equation. They

need to face the fact that by giving parking permits to everyone who asks, they are creating a severe hardship for those who truly need the advantages of a wider parking stall. Doctors need to face reality, and tell their able-bodied patients who want a parking permit, that they can't have one.

Perhaps we should create a second type of special parking stall. After all, many stores now offer special parking places for pregnant women, hybrid car drivers, and people who carry the right type of credit card. Accessible stalls should be marked that they are only for the use of those people using mobility aids. The new type of stall could be marked for those 'too lazy to walk a few more feet.'

The issuing authorities for the parking permits also have to toughen up. When issuing and renewing permits, they should be asking what type of mobility aid the applicant needs. If the doctor indicates that they do not use a mobility aid, the parking permit should be denied.

Accessible parking spots should be left to those who need the accessibility, not those who want a spot close to the starting line of their half-marathon.