

# **Hospital Authority's deposit refund arrangements for assistive device loan service Investigation Report**

## **The Complaint**

On 25 July 2023, the complainant borrowed a wheelchair on behalf of a family member from the Occupational Therapy Department of a hospital ("Hospital A") under the Hospital Authority ("HA"), and was issued a deposit receipt after paying a deposit of \$1,000 at its Shroff Office. On 27 July, after returning the wheelchair to the Occupational Therapy Department, he was issued a written certificate confirming that the wheelchair had been properly returned, which he brought to the Shroff Office to request a refund of the deposit. However, the staff insisted that the complainant could not obtain a refund without presenting the deposit receipt. The complainant considered the certificate from the Occupational Therapy Department, together with his own identity document, sufficient to prove the return of the wheelchair and his identity as the borrower. He alleged that Hospital A was unreasonable in requiring him to present the deposit receipt as a prerequisite for refund.

## **Our Findings**

### ***Assistive Device Loan Service***

2. Hospitals under HA have assistive devices (including wheelchairs, walking frames, crutches, etc.) available for loan, free of rental charge, to patients with clinical needs. Primarily intended for allied health patients who need support during the initial post-discharge period or pending delivery of self-purchased devices, the loan service aims to facilitate their rehabilitation progress and daily living. To ensure the timely return of the devices in good condition, HA requires borrowers to pay a deposit refundable upon the punctual and proper return of the loaned devices.

### ***Procedures for Borrowing and Returning Assistive Devices***

3. Patients at public hospitals who need to borrow assistive devices must first submit an application to the relevant Allied Health Department. Borrowers may be the patients or their family members. The Allied Health Department requires borrowers to provide their name and identity document, and to sign an Assistive Device Loan Service

Agreement that stipulates the loan conditions and regulations. The Allied Health Department will then issue a Notice to Borrower listing the points to note regarding the loan service and deposit refund, along with a Deposit Payment Notice for the borrower to pay the deposit at the hospital's Finance or Shroff Office. Based on the information in the Deposit Payment Notice, the Finance Office will input into the relevant Computer System the borrower's name, the serial number of the loaned device, the deposit amount, etc. Upon receiving the deposit, the Finance Office will issue a deposit receipt, which the borrower can present to the Allied Health Department to collect the device.

4. When the assistive device is returned to the hospital's Allied Health Department and confirmed to be in good condition, staff will issue a Deposit Refund Notice certifying that the borrower has returned the device intact and is entitled to a refund. The borrower can then obtain a refund from the Finance Office by presenting the notice, identity document and deposit receipt.

### ***Relevant Guidelines***

5. HA's accounting procedures ("Accounting Procedures") stipulate that borrowers (including patients) must present the original deposit receipt when requesting a refund of deposit. If the receipt is lost, the borrower may submit a Refund Application Form declaring the loss for the Finance Office to process the refund. Alternatively, the borrower may complete the Refund Application Form authorising a representative to handle the procedures and collect the deposit refund.

### ***Response from HA***

6. HA stated that the complainant returned the wheelchair to Hospital A's Occupational Therapy Department on 27 July 2023. After that, he requested a refund of deposit at the Shroff Office, but was unable to present the deposit receipt. In accordance with the Accounting Procedures, shroff staff requested that he present the receipt before processing the refund. Shroff staff also explained the alternative refund procedures in cases where the receipt is missing.

7. In August 2023, the complainant lodged a complaint with Hospital A regarding the incident. Upon reviewing the case, Hospital A found that the staff of Occupational Therapy Department had not provided the complainant with the Notice to Borrower (which specifies that deposit payers must present the deposit receipt to obtain a refund) when processing his application for borrowing the wheelchair. As a result, the

complainant might be unaware of this requirement. HA handled the complainant's case flexibly and refunded in mid-September the deposit for borrowing the wheelchair without requiring him to present the receipt.

8. HA explained that the refund of deposits involves financial transactions and should be handled with caution. By requiring deposit payers to present the deposit receipt and relevant documents when obtaining a refund, HA can verify the records in the Computer System and the payer's information, and confirm the scope and amount of the refund. In the complainant's case, shroff staff was acting in accordance with the Accounting Procedures (see **para. 5**) in requiring the complainant to present the deposit receipt.

9. During our investigation, HA also found that Hospital A's Occupational Therapy Department generally disallowed the authorisation of a representative to handle and collect deposit refunds on behalf of borrowers, deviating from HA's established procedures of allowing borrowers to do so (see **para. 5**). HA admitted that the arrangements at Hospital A were inconsistent with HA's established procedures and could cause inconvenience to borrowers. HA, therefore, has urged Hospital A to follow the established procedures regarding authorisation when handling refund applications.

10. During our investigation, we asked HA to review the relevant arrangements and explore any room for improvement, particularly to save borrowers the trouble of presenting the deposit receipt for refund collection after returning the device. HA replied that due to the different service nature, demand and staffing arrangements of each hospital, the actual operations of assistive device loan service vary (including the information of deposit payers recorded in the Computer System, the format of forms, and whether authorisation of representative for refund collection is allowed). HA agreed with our view that there is room for improvement in the workflow for assistive device loan service. It has initiated the work to formulate the HA Guidelines for Assistive Device Loan Service ("New Guidelines"), the Booklet of Conditions and Regulations for Assistive Device Loan Service ("Booklet"), Assistive Device Loan Agreement and Deposit Refund Certificate, with a view to standardising procedures across all hospitals and ensuring borrowers are well informed of the procedures and regulations.

11. After implementation of the New Guidelines, borrowers will be required to sign the Assistive Device Loan Agreement when borrowing devices from a hospital to

confirm acceptance of all conditions regarding the return of loaned devices and acknowledge receipt of the Booklet. When paying the deposit, the hospital will record the borrower's name and the patient's identity card number in the Computer System and issue a deposit receipt. Subsequently, after returning the assistive device, borrowers only need to present their identity document and the Deposit Refund Certificate issued upon return of the assistive device to obtain a refund. In general, the deposit receipt will no longer be required.

## **Our Comments**

12. Assistive devices help patients in need manage daily living activities and facilitate their rehabilitation progress. We commend HA for providing assistive device loan service free of charge to support patients and their carers.

13. In the complainant's case, HA admitted that when the complainant borrowed the wheelchair, the relevant staff had not provided the Notice to Borrower to advise him that the deposit receipt was required for obtaining a refund. After reviewing the case, HA exercised discretion and refunded the deposit without requiring the complainant to present the receipt (see **para. 7**).

14. Nevertheless, during our investigation, we were concerned about the inconvenience caused to the public by HA's requirement, and any room for improvement.

15. As the refund of deposits involves financial transactions, we acknowledge that HA must handle with caution. According to information provided by HA, its requirement for presentation of the deposit receipt serves the purpose of confirming the identity of the borrower who originally paid the deposit, and ensuring the refund of deposit to the same person. However, as noted in **paragraph 3**, hospitals already record the borrower's name and deposit amount in the Computer System at the time of payment. In the complainant's case, Hospital A also recorded his identity card number when he borrowed the wheelchair. On the day of returning the wheelchair, the Deposit Refund Notice (see **para. 4**) and identity document presented by the complainant were sufficient to confirm the return of the wheelchair and his identity. Shroff staff could have confirmed that the complainant was the deposit payer and the refund amount by referring to the hospital's records in the Computer System. It was unnecessary to require the complainant to present the deposit receipt for verifying such information and status. In our view, Hospital A's insisting that the complainant present the deposit

receipt for refund collection after returning the assistive device was overly rigid, inflexible and redundant in practice. In this case, the wheelchair was borrowed for only two days. Yet in cases with a longer loan period, it may not be uncommon for borrowers to not have the deposit receipt with them when returning the device. We urge HA to modernise and enhance its existing arrangements, and explore how to handle similar refund applications in compliance with the prudent accounting principle, while also providing convenience for the public. This would help avoid the inconvenient situations where members of the public are denied a refund for not bringing a receipt, and have to return to the hospital on another day to complete the procedures.

16. We are pleased to note that, following the launch of our full investigation, HA is in the progress of reviewing and enhancing the procedures for assistive device loan service. HA agreed that borrowers will generally no longer be required to present the deposit receipt when applying for a refund; it will also standardise the workflow for assistive device loan service across all its hospitals, and formulate the necessary documents and materials to inform borrowers of the procedures and regulations (see **paras. 10 and 11**).

17. In addition, our investigation revealed that Hospital A's Occupational Therapy Department was not in compliance with HA's established procedures and guidelines in insisting that borrowers could not authorise a representative to collect deposit refunds (see **para. 9**).

18. Based on the above analysis, The Ombudsman considers the complaint against HA **substantiated**.

## **Recommendations**

19. The Ombudsman recommends that HA:

- (1) share this case with staff responsible for handling applications for borrowing assistive devices and related deposits;
- (2) remind relevant staff that, when providing assistive device loan service, they must inform borrowers of the points to note regarding the loan and return procedures;
- (3) monitor and take action to ensure that Hospital A and other hospitals

follow HA's established procedures in allowing borrowers to authorise a representative to collect deposit refunds;

- (4) expedite the enhancement of arrangements and workflow for assistive device loan service at public hospitals to standardise the current practice of allowing authorisation of a representative to collect deposit refunds, and remove the requirement for borrowers to present the deposit receipt when applying for a refund under general circumstances in future;
- (5) stipulate in the New Guidelines that borrowers may authorise a representative to collect deposit refunds on their behalf;
- (6) clearly specify in both the New Guidelines and the Booklet whether the authorised representative of borrowers must present the deposit receipt or any other supporting documents to collect deposit refunds;
- (7) before completing the above enhancements, consider whether the requirement for borrowers to present the deposit receipt for refunds can be waived in general circumstances;
- (8) provide staff training to ensure their awareness and understanding of the newly formulated New Guidelines and related documents (see **para. 10**), and proper implementation of the guidelines;
- (9) formulate measures to ensure that all public hospitals consistently adhere to the New Guidelines in handling assistive device loan cases in future;
- (10) develop proper monitoring measures for the New Guidelines to avoid recurrence of incidents similar to the complainant's case, where staff omitted to provide or collect signed documents from borrowers;
- (11) after finalising the New Guidelines, closely monitor its implementation and ensure that borrowers are well informed about the assistive device loan service of hospitals; and
- (12) consider reviewing the existing refund arrangements for various hospital services; if any arrangements are found to be inconsistent with HA's established procedures and guidelines, promptly instruct hospitals to

make rectification.

**Office of The Ombudsman**  
**September 2025**

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