
When Need Clashes with Profit

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In the complex landscape of daily life in Cuba, where transportation difficulties are a palpable reality, a particularly delicate scenario emerges: the areas surrounding hospitals. These spaces, intended for healing and relief, have become the starting point for a human drama playing out on the sidewalk, between vulnerable patients and vehicle drivers.

The scene repeats itself with worrying frequency. Individuals recently discharged or finishing a medical appointment, often with limited mobility, face the cold logic of an informal transportation market. Families are then forced to negotiate a price that, on multiple occasions, turns out to be exorbitant. The patient's urgency clashes with the law of supply and demand in its rawest form.

One cannot deny the situation faced by the owners or those responsible for these automobiles. Operating a vehicle in the largest of the Antilles today involves navigating a labyrinth of scarcity and uncertainty to access spare parts and fuel, frequently at very high prices and in parallel markets. Maintaining a car is a near-daily feat, it is true, and therefore it is understandable that the service provided seeks to cover these costs and generate a profit margin that justifies the effort and investment, as well as contributing to the personal income of the drivers, who likely must cover significant expenses to support their families.

However, there is a fine line between a fair charge, which compensates for the vehicle's wear and tear, and speculation that takes advantage of the desperation and helplessness of others. When the passenger is not just any customer, but a sick person whose only option is to get home, the transaction ceases to be merely commercial and enters the realm of the moral. We are talking about someone who had to go to a hospital, not someone leaving a recreation center. In situations like this, human empathy should dictate a code of conduct that transcends cold economic calculation.

In a society where, despite the grave economic crisis, there are thousands of workers whose labor has great social impact without their salaries being sufficient to meet challenges like the one being analyzed, it is difficult to normalize the practice of obtaining maximum profit at the expense of others' misfortune—especially when the scene

unfolds at the gates of a health center.

On the other hand, the entire responsibility cannot be placed on the shoulders of private drivers. The persistence of this phenomenon is also a symptom of the cracks in the public transportation system, especially in specialized services like ambulances for medical discharges or non-urgent transfers. The lack of affordable and efficient options creates a vacuum that is filled by the non-state sector, sometimes without clear controls or regulations.

The solution, as is often the case with various internal problems, is not simple. Beyond appealing to individual goodwill, mechanisms should be sought that combine a realistic economic understanding with the social sensitivity championed by our national project. Fortunately, within that ecosystem of drivers waiting for fares outside hospitals, there are also people who, without failing to charge for their services, agree to provide them at reasonable prices, thereby contributing with their work to the care of vulnerable patients.

At its core, this conflict at the exits of hospital institutions is a mirror of a larger dilemma: how to build a coexistence where entrepreneurship and solidarity are not antagonistic concepts. The challenge lies in finding a point of equilibrium where the right to a legitimate livelihood does not eclipse the moral duty to assist one's neighbor in a moment of need.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
