

Health chief told to repay helicopter fee

Nadeem Badshah, *The Times*, April 2 2018



Keith Conradi, a former Virgin Atlantic pilot, flew over the Cotswold Hills at a cost of £562 to the taxpayer

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The head of a patient safety unit who billed taxpayers for a helicopter lesson after arguing that it was vital for his job has been ordered to repay the money.

Keith Conradi, chief investigator at the healthcare safety investigation branch (HSIB), flew a lightweight helicopter over the Cotswold Hills in January last year at a cost of £562.

The former Virgin Atlantic pilot, who holds an airline transport licence, also used his government procurement card to pay for a full

pilot's medical examination at Gatwick airport in February last year that cost £234.

Mr Conradi, 56, had argued that as Jeremy Hunt, the health secretary, wanted the NHS to learn lessons from the airline industry's safety record and performance on investigations, it entitled him to bill the taxpayer for retaining his private helicopter licence.

He has now been ordered to pay the money back by the health service's financial watchdog. A spokesman said that the reimbursement was "in process".

The Department of Health and Social Care said last night that it was investigating Mr Conradi's case and others to see if there had been inappropriate use of taxpayer's money. A spokesman said: "Patients will be appalled if there has been inappropriate use of taxpayers' money."

The HSIB, which became operational in April last year, investigates serious medical errors so the NHS can learn lessons and prevent recurrences.

Mr Conradi, who was appointed to his role in 2016, told the *Daily Mail*: "I am proud to be at the forefront of the first organisation in the world to be creating a pioneering safety investigation methodology for the NHS that matches that of the air industry. This will save lives and reduce patient harm in future years because HSIB learning and patient safety recommendations will be widely shared across NHS service providers in England."

The newspaper also reported that in the past two years health organisation executives had used taxpayer-funded credit cards to pay for go-karting and five-star hotels amounting to £5.8 million. The cards are a way of paying for low-value goods or services, including employee training.

Mark Littlewood, of the Institute of Economic Affairs think tank, said: "The financial constraint of the NHS is made all the more depressing when we see how carelessly the money is being spent."

