



Nursing job that's 'badge of pride'

As the Post's Good Deeds campaign urges people to do 1,000 kind acts in the community, health correspondent **Peter Blackburn** speaks to nurses who have been going above and beyond the call of duty for years

MORE than 26,500 people in Nottinghamshire are living with cancer and the number is expected to almost double by 2030. For these people, who have faced a life-changing diagnosis or are receiving treatment or end-of-life care, a group of nurses, all working under the banner of Macmillan, are true heroes.

Forty years after they were established, the Macmillan nurses are much more than kind staff who help make dying people as comfortable as possible. Thanks to major progress in science, cancer is no longer necessarily a death sentence, and here in Nottinghamshire Macmillan-funded staff are helping people to live with the condition, deal with life after recovery and protect against recurrences of the disease.

Nicky Webb is one of those nurses, having taken on a newly-created role with children and young people. Based at the Queen's Medical Centre, Nicky is part of a Macmillan-funded project in which youngsters who have been free of treatment for five years are given regular advice by specialist nurses on how to live their lives to avoid a recurrence of cancer, and manage symptoms resulting from harsh treatments like chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

"It's massively important," said Nicky, who has 20 years of experience in paediatric oncology and has worked at the QMC since 1987. "Once they are five years from the end of their treatment, I get involved. It's a privilege. I meet them when they are becoming adolescents and they want to know information. They need to be fully aware of their health needs when they go off to university.

"If anything happens to them after that, a relapse or symptoms, it means they are more comfortable and they are more able to deal with what happens.

"They are treated at a very young age and they might not have known what they had or the impact on their health. We look at the treatment they receive and find out the later effects they could have, like heart problems or liver issues."

Nicky also educates her patients in how to prevent their cancer coming back.

She said: "The biggest problem is secondary cancers, so we have to educate them on the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and reducing that risk, and we set up screening programmes. Their treatment may have affected their fertility, so it's looking at that, too.

“It’s very much making sure all the services are tied together and that people can access them. People need support after diagnosis and through recovery.

“Now we’re sharing all that information with them, they can live their lives with their peers and they can get out there and get rid of that label of being a cancer patient.”

For Nicky, the 40th anniversary of Macmillan nurses is a time to appreciate being part of the caring organisation.

She said: “It is a badge of pride. Over my 30-year career as a nurse, I’ve seen Macmillan develop from just hospice care to everything. It’s brilliant.”

Michael Prior, 58, helped set up the project. The former civil servant, of West Bridgford, underwent an aggressive course of radio and chemotherapy at the age of 24 to cure malignant teratoma.

He was first diagnosed with teratoma, a type of cancer which develops in the foetus, more than 30 years ago when he was a student at university. Due to the late diagnosis, surgery was not an option, so he had chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Despite his poor prognosis, the treatment was successful but Michael has been left with severe long-term damage, including mobility problems caused by neurological damage, and stomach problems. A secondary cancer has now been detected in his one remaining kidney.

When Michael was recovering, there was no service to help him get through life, but he is now working with Macmillan to develop the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in Nottinghamshire.

He said: “I never had a care plan. It was probably too scary to consider at the time when we were thinking I’d only have two or three years left. Many people didn’t think I’d get through it.

“I did get through it, which I’m very grateful for, but I had no idea what I’d have to deal with afterwards. When treatment ends, you’re on your own. If the GPs involved in looking after me had made me aware of the long-term effects, I would have been ready. Having this type of support would have made a big difference to me.”

The role of Stephanie Day, an adult oncology nurse based at the QMC and supported by Macmillan, is another example of the work being done to help people with cancer. Part of a team of four, Stephanie is alerted when a patient with cancer enters the hospital and she speaks to them, assesses their needs and makes sure they go to the right department.

It is a role that can be crucial, given that sepsis is a major risk and they need to be given antibiotics within an hour of the onset of the condition.

Stephanie, who has been nursing for seven years, said: “We can get the treatment more quickly – some of the patients can become very unwell very quickly.”

Macmillan used to be known for the nurses who support patients and families in the community and their own homes. While other services are also available now, these dedicated nurses are still available across Nottinghamshire.

Helen Coxon has been a clinical nurse specialist in the community for 15 years, caring for people after diagnosis as well as towards the end of their lives.

She said: "It is a very privileged role and we are working with people at distressing and difficult times. But we can have a very therapeutic relationship with patients and the families as well, who need support.

"It's an organisation that is very highly regarded by the public and we have specialist knowledge around cancer. It's a privilege to work with Macmillan."

Forty years after the first Macmillan nurse was appointed, the legacy is not only ongoing but flourishing in Nottingham, where a health service constantly stretched is providing care for people at the most difficult time of their lives, thanks to the funding of charities like Macmillan.

Elaine Wilson, senior Macmillan development manager for the East Midlands said: "For a long time, cancer meant a death sentence. But the story of cancer is changing. There isn't just one cancer, but more than 200. We're getting better at diagnosing it earlier and treatments are improving. While some people will still die of cancer, more are living longer with it and some are surviving it.

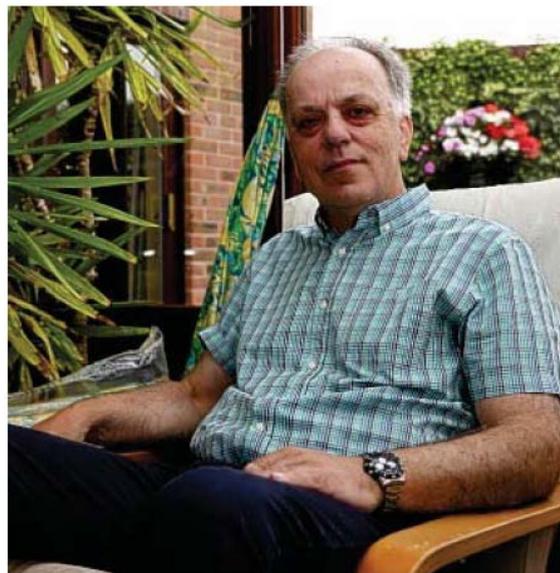
"Since putting in place its first nurse, Macmillan's role has grown. We now fund a wider range of health professionals, from physiotherapists to dieticians. We provide advice and support through local information and support centres and our welfare rights services help to ease money worries for people affected by cancer."

FOUR MORE BACK CAMPAIGN

GLEEDS, Retail Assist, Baker Tilly and Pretty Windows Day Nursery are the latest organisations to back the Post's Good Deeds Notts campaign. Our aim is to get 1,000 individuals, groups and businesses to promise to do an act of kindness in the next 12 months. We also want to celebrate all the wonderful good deeds already being done on our communities. To get involved, tell us about your charitable act. You can email newsdesk@nottinghampost.com and send us your photographs. Or visit www.nottinghampost.com/gooddeedsnotts. You can also tweet about our campaign at #gooddeedsnotts. More than 60 local organisations have now promised to support us and dozens of good deeds have been done since we launched the campaign just under two weeks ago. They include sponsored head shaves, giving food to needy people and even rescuing a family of hedgehogs! Organisations that have pledged their support

include:

- Age UK Notts
- Notts Healthcare
- Advice Nottingham
- Trent Academies Group
- Notts Victim Support
- WeLove Bulwell
- Notts County Football in the Community
- Right Track Social Enterprise
- The Flying High Trust
- Gedling Borough Council
- Daybrook Baptist Church
- Kimberley Town Council
- Alzheimer's Society Notts
- Bulwell Forest Action Group
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Costa Coffee branches in Mapperley, Arnold, Hucknall, Bingham, Long Eaton and Beeston
- Broxtowe Borough Council
- Autism East Midlands
- Nottingham and Southwell Diocese
- L&G Homecare Services
- Nottingham Air-IT Squash
- Sainsbury's branches in Arnold, Kimberley, Beeston, Perry Road and Castle Boulevard
- Carlton Town Football Club.



Michael Prior, 58, underwent an aggressive course of radio and chemotherapy at 24



Macmillan nurse Nicky Webb chatting with one of her patients