

PRIMARY CARE 10 TOP TIPS

Author:
Helen Rickard, Macmillan Healthcare Project Officer
Charlotte Argyle, Macmillan Carers Support Manager

Supporting carers of people living with cancer

Macmillan Cancer Support defines a carer as someone who looks after a person with cancer who could not manage without this help. The carer isn't paid for providing this support. There are 1.1 million carers of people with cancer in the UK.

Despite the vital care they provide, many of these people wouldn't describe themselves as carers. They would probably say 'I'm just being their partner, daughter or friend ...'

Using language such as 'do you look after/support someone?' rather than 'are you a carer?' can help identify these 'hidden carers'.

For more background on carers of people with cancer, please see overleaf.

1 Ask and listen
Showing an interest can help carers talk about their needs. If a patient brings a friend, relative or partner with them, ask them how they are. If time is limited encourage the carer to make a separate appointment.

2 Signpost to services
If you identify a cancer carer let them know that they can access a range of information, emotional support and financial help by calling the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**

3 Develop a carers register
Create a list of carers registered with your practice. Ask new patients if they look after someone and find existing carers via promotional posters and drop-in sessions such as the annual flu jab.

4 Identify a 'carers lead'
The carers lead will be first point of contact for carers, maintain the carers register and develop links with local carers organisations.

5 Promote local support
Develop links with local carers organisations and display their information in the waiting room. Refer carers for social services carers' assessments if appropriate. For further details visit macmillan.org.uk/carers

6 Be aware of financial difficulties
Macmillan's expert benefit advisers can help cancer carers understand what they might be entitled to and support them in applying for financial help. Refer them to our Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** or macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport

7 Involve carers in patient care
Include carers in decision making by asking for their views and any problems they can foresee.

8 Consider the carer's health
Carers often neglect their own health due to constraints on their time. Consider offering specific health checks for carers.

9 Plan for emergencies
Let carers know that some local authorities can provide carers with a card to carry stating they are a carer. Ringing the number triggers an action plan providing emergency substitute support.

10 Monitor your support
Use surveys and focus groups to gain carers' views on the service and their suggestions for improvement.

About carers of people with cancer

Macmillan commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct research into carers of people with cancer to ensure we reach and support carers as effectively as possible.

- Around 1.1 million people in the UK aged 15+ are caring for someone with cancer.
- 49% of cancer carers are not receiving any support to help them in their caring role.
- 62% of carers of people with cancer are women.
- 48% of cancer carers are working full or part time.
- The majority of cancer carers live separately from the person or people they support, and half are supporting a person who is currently undergoing treatment for cancer.
- Carers of people with cancer give an average of almost 15 hours of support each week, most commonly emotional support, followed by helping with errands or providing transport.
- Only a minority of people who look after someone with cancer actually consider themselves to be 'carers' (43%); half of them (51%) say this word describes them little or not at all. Those who provide less intensive support, male carers and those looking after someone younger than 65 are less likely to identify with the term.

References

Ipsos MORI for Macmillan Cancer Support. *More than a million*. 2011

Princess Royal Trust for Carers. *Supporting Carers: An action guide for general practitioners and their teams*. 2011