

CANCER AS A LONG TERM CONDITION: PRACTICE NURSE PILOT

Evaluation – Executive summary

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Introduction

This pilot course was developed to discover what the learning needs of practice nurses are in relation to extending their role in managing cancer as a long-term condition, and how best to meet these needs.

An additional aim was to enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence of participating practice nurses to look after people living with cancer and beyond.

The course comprised two whole and seven half day workshops, with reflective group work, role play and teaching sessions from the course leader and external presenters. One patient partnership panel representative attended all the sessions. Participants were encouraged to do work in their practices between sessions, applying what had been learnt to their everyday work.

Specific objectives of the pilot were to:

- 1 Test the process of engaging practice nurses in managing cancer as a long term condition.
- 2 Determine the learning needs of established practice nurses to take a greater role in the support and care of people after primary cancer treatment.
- 3 Establish how to meet these learning needs effectively.
- 4 Capture the learnings to inform further development of course content for practice nurses.
- 5 Enable practical application of learnings by practice nurses in a clinical setting with support and mentorship from the associated GP practice.
- 6 Provide a model for engaging practice nurses in managing cancer as a long term condition that could be rolled out further.

Objectives of the evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to establish to what extent the aims of the pilot had been met – and particularly to determine if the course had enhanced nurses' knowledge, skills and confidence to look after people living with cancer and beyond. Specific questions that the evaluation sought to address were:

- To what extent has the course provided practice nurses with the knowledge and skills they need to support people living with cancer? Are additional knowledge or skills needed?
- Has the behaviour of the practice nurses changed as a result of the course and in what ways?
- To what extent have they taken on an increased role with patients after cancer treatment?
- Have there been barriers to taking on an increased role and are there ways in which these barriers have been addressed?
- Has their learning led to changed activity, relationships and roles in their practices?
- Has there been patient benefit as a result of changed behaviour?
- Which tools and resources covered in the course have they found most useful in practice?
- To what extent have links been made with professionals in secondary care?

This evaluation will consider:

- If there has been patient benefit as a result of changed behaviour.
- How nurses have made a difference for both people affected by cancer and their practice and colleagues.
- What practice nurses are doing differently as a result of the course.
- What the learnings have been for practice nurses in terms of knowledge, confidence, skills and strategies.

At the outset, the practice nurses' hopes and expectations for themselves and their practices included:

- Gaining a greater understanding of cancer care, to help them meet the needs of people affected by cancer and to provide better long term management.
- Being able to carry out cancer care reviews.
- Communicating with cancer patients more easily.
- Gaining a greater knowledge of cancer, including the side effects and long term effects.
- An increased confidence in answering questions from people affected by cancer.
- Networking and obtaining ideas about starting clinics for all chronic diseases and for their fears about talking to people about cancer to be addressed.

The GP supporters hoped that the nurses would:

- Gain increased knowledge, interest in cancer care, and confidence.
- Gain a more formalised approach to cancer care and palliative register, and a multidisciplinary approach.
- Be proactive in providing support and follow up for cancer patients and to give better care.
- Have more time to answer questions at cancer care reviews.

How did these practice nurses make a difference for people affected by cancer?

Ten themes emerged:

- 1** An increased ability to communicate effectively with people living with cancer.
- 2** Acting as a catalyst in the practice for better support to people living with cancer.
- 3** An increased knowledge of what people affected by cancer can do to help themselves.
- 4** An increased understanding of the benefits of exercise and adopting a healthy lifestyle.
- 5** Supporting people to make positive choices about exercise and lifestyle and taking action to improve their overall quality of life (e.g. improving/restoring relationships, going back to work).
- 6** An increased awareness of the information available to practice nurses.
- 7** An increased awareness of available services and resources for people affected by cancer.
- 8** Increasing people's confidence in their ability to self-manage.
- 9** Taking a more active role in managing the condition on an ongoing basis.
- 10** Having a greater insight into the ongoing needs of people living with and beyond cancer and how to integrate these needs into existing care pathways.

How have these practice nurses made a difference to the practice and their colleagues?

Five themes emerged:

- 1 Making themselves available to others as a resource in the practice.
- 2 All practice staff (GPs, nurses and reception staff) are more engaged on issues relating to cancer.
- 3 Having a better understanding of issues relating to management of cancer.
- 4 Providing better support for people living with cancer.
- 5 Patients are using the practice more often as a source of information and support.

What are these practice nurses doing differently?

The majority of nurses are now engaged in conducting cancer care reviews.

The nurses gave examples of how they are now acting differently, under eight themes:

- 1 Adopting a changed pattern of care that involves more proactive, scheduled interactions with people living with cancer.
- 2 Managing cancer as a long term condition with increased confidence.
- 3 Inviting people for cancer care reviews.
- 4 Delivering cancer care review, assessment and care planning as a result of understanding of key concepts and developments in cancer care. Some nurses are doing combined chronic disease and cancer clinics, seeing patients annually, and following them up as necessary.
- 5 Assessing people's information needs, providing that information, or referring to other sources as appropriate.

- 6 Applying their increased understanding of when patients would benefit from referrals (for medical, psychological, financial or social support).
- 7 Assessing the effect of cancer on family members/carers when appropriate.
- 8 Using learning resources for themselves and colleagues.

GP supporters' views

GP supporters were asked to give examples of evidence of the nurses' learning and how it has made a difference in the practice. They confirmed that:

- The nurses in general had found the course useful and a good learning experience.
- Most nurses are now actively involved in cancer care reviews and there is a well structured recall system.
- Nurses were using tools from the course such as the template for cancer care reviews.

The GP supporters also gave examples of changes and more communication between nurses, GPs and patients within the practices, which they felt had resulted in better quality of care. As a result of the course (and other developments within practices) some practices established a new protocol for managing palliative care patients, an integrated clinic, and improved out of hours contact and communication. There was now a proactive follow up for patients and a feeling that the practice is available to them.

GP supporters were also of the opinion that funding and resourcing would be necessary for practice nurses to continue making a difference.

Practice nurse learnings

Practice nurses reported a wide range of learnings from the course, and 18 themes emerged under two broad categories:

A. Knowledge and confidence

- 1 Increased knowledge of cancer as a disease and its treatment.
- 2 Increased knowledge of how to support people with cancer to self-manage (health and lifestyle) like patients with other chronic conditions.
- 3 Increased knowledge of how to assess patients' needs including needs relating to the disease, to treatment and beyond.
- 4 Increased confidence in their ability to manage cancer as a chronic condition.
- 5 Increased knowledge of the indicators of recurrence and of what to do when indicators appear.
- 6 Increased awareness of the resources available for people living with cancer.
- 7 Increased understanding of cancer as a long term condition.

B. Skills and strategies

- 8 Increased ability to communicate about difficult issues to people living with cancer.
- 9 Increased understanding of key concepts and developments in cancer care like the cancer care review, assessment and care planning, and treatment summary.
- 10 Increased use and awareness of learning resources, for themselves and colleagues.
- 11 Strategies and a readiness to support more people living with cancer.
- 12 Routine use of available clinical tools for identifying patient needs.
- 13 Signposting patients to other services more often and more effectively.
- 14 Making use of other services and sources of information when needed.
- 15 Greater insight into the course content and educational materials that can help to meet the learning needs of practice nurses.
- 16 Encouraging patients to be proactive/take action in managing their condition.
- 17 Making recommendations to patients about exercise and lifestyle.
- 18 Communicating with people living with cancer more effectively and in relation to a wider range of issues including those that may be sensitive or difficult.

How did the course help the participant nurses?

The nurses all had very positive reactions to the course.

They found that the pre-course quiz highlighted their lack of knowledge, the small group learning was beneficial, and the fast feedback forms, learning tools and website were all useful. They also found the input from patients very valuable, and overall they increased their knowledge and skills, and found the speakers and the organisation of the course excellent.

How did the practice nurses demonstrate that their colleagues and the practice benefitted or learnt from the course?

- 1 Cancer patients need more time than doctors are able to provide, hence delegating the interview to the nurse is beneficial.
- 2 Learning about how the Macmillan service is developing, in particular the education programme and the nurse training.
- 3 Macmillan has raised the profile of cancer care and the nurse practitioner is well placed to support people with a cancer diagnosis and to manage cancer as another long term disease.
- 4 Certain cancer patients are better looked after by secondary care than others. It is useful for people to have a particular point of nurse contact within the practice.
- 5 The need to keep a better register of cancer patients.

Patient partnership panel representative views

The patient panel representative, who was present at all the sessions of the course, confirmed that the nurses had progressed in their learning and communication skills, which was borne out in the views expressed in the interviews with the nurses.

He observed the large impact the patient input had on the nurses.

He felt it was important for patients to have a nurse as a contact point to phone if they were feeling isolated, and this was a result of interviews with the nurses.

Conclusion

The course met its intended aims for most participants.

This method of learning resulted in reports of changed practice and behaviour, which was confirmed by the GP supporters in many instances. The nurses were able to demonstrate and give examples of how their thinking and behaviour had made a difference to patients and their families, to their own way of working and to the practices and their colleagues.

Nurses now feel they have the confidence to see cancer patients, whereas previously they would not have had any input. They also now feel well informed, and able to use the skills acquired on the course which have led to a change in their attitude towards people affected by cancer.

The interviews allowed the nurses to explore their emotional journeys – from fear to becoming confident in their new roles. This common thread of emotions was evident throughout the interviews. The nurses expressed a variety of emotions in relation to themselves, and also described how they perceived people felt in relation to their cancer.

The majority of the nurses were now conducting cancer care reviews and had found ways of seeing cancer patients within their working time in addition to their other work.

More than one in three of us will get cancer.
For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever
face. And the feelings of loneliness and isolation
that so many people experience make it even harder.

No one should face cancer alone. And with your
support no one will.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call us free
on **0808 808 00 00** (Monday to Friday, 9am–5 pm)
or visit **[macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)**