



Life stories for wellbeing at Garden House Hospice

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Project background

Garden House Hospice Care is based in Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. It provides specialist palliative care to individuals with life-limiting conditions, and those important to them. Garden House Hospice Care works closely with hospital and community multidisciplinary teams to offer a high standard of patient care in all settings and personal choice for the patient as to their preferred place of care and death.

All individuals have a story to tell. During palliative and terminal phases of life, past experiences often impact on how an individual responds to their diagnosis, treatment and care. At a Hospice UK conference, one staff member of Garden House Hospice attended a talk on the use of patient stories in end-of-life care, delivered by an independent storyteller Miranda Quinney. The talk inspired the staff member to share the work that had been going on with regard to patient stories, suggesting this could be something worth developing at Garden House Hospice. It was felt that patients accessing day services would benefit most from this initiative as they are nearer the beginning of their palliative care journey.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to provide a forum for patients to be able to share and process their story in the context of their illness. To achieve this, the objectives identified were to:

- Engage key stakeholders in the project by inviting Miranda Quinney to facilitate a workshop at the hospice
- Engage patients in the life stories for wellbeing group
- Plan and pilot the sessions for the life stories for wellbeing group

Implications for practice

- Enabling people at end of life to connect and share their life stories helps them to see themselves and be seen as a person first and foremost
- The assumption that people at end of life will be too unwell to connect and share life stories should be challenged and they should be offered the opportunity to do so
- The resources required to run a life stories for wellbeing group are small and it provides an alternative activity for people at end of life

This project was supported by the FoNS Patients First Programme in partnership with The Burdett Trust for Nursing

Online

Further information about the project can be accessed from: fons.org/library/report-details?nstd=73169

Key activities and outcomes

• Engaging key stakeholders in the project

In March 2016 a workshop was held, facilitated by Miranda Quinney, who had used a patient story model at other hospices and found patients benefited greatly from exploring and sharing their stories. Staff from all areas of Garden House Hospice Care were invited to attend this workshop, including the inpatient unit, day services, hospice at home, family support and therapies. The workshop was experiential and brought home to the individuals in attendance that everyone has a story to tell. The workshop also gave the project team some methods and approaches to enable them to start a 'life stories for wellbeing' group at the hospice.

Patient engagement

A flyer was designed to promote the sessions. The project team decided to set up a group of up to five patients, for a series of five sessions on consecutive Thursdays. The sessions were promoted through day services, and individuals attending a 'coping well' course were found to be particularly interested in this opportunity. The patients were recruited via attendance at day services, where they were informed of the availability of the workshops and invited to attend. The staff in day services were involved in information giving verbally and also with flyers.

Review and evaluation of the story-sharing workshops

Three series of life stories for wellbeing groups have been held where participants share their life stories/memories around a particular theme. The sessions were designed so that each patient would share their story with one other, then each individual would relay the story they had heard to the rest of the group. The individual whose story it was could chip in if anything was missed, or not told quite as they had meant it. A volunteer recorded the stories and they were audiotaped and then typed up and given to the patient and also available to family members as a keepsake. Feedback was gathered in an informal open discussion, in which the project team asked questions and recorded the verbal feedback. Feedback has been very positive:

'Even with the sadness everyone has gone through, and a lot of sadness to come, [these sessions] are very helpful because I remember things that gave me joy.'

'I like the diversity of people. The props are really good, they get your brain going. I'm enjoying it. It's good in terms of our lives at the moment when we spend so much time being asked how we are, how's our condition, how's the medication – this takes you away from all that. It takes you back to who you are.'

'It's important to be reminded that you are not just your illness – there is so much of us that was there before. It's nice to bring happier memories and it's destressing to have the ability to concentrate on something else.'