



FoNS Improvement Insights

Developing a Supportive Care Clinic for Women with Gynaecological Cancer

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Project background

A diagnosis or potential diagnosis of gynaecological cancer is a traumatic experience not just for the woman but the family. Best practice guidelines recommend all women with a suspected or confirmed diagnosis of gynaecological malignancy (except for early stage cancer) receive their surgical treatment in a specialist centre. Such centres are able to offer the woman detailed information about their condition, proposed treatment and active support and co-ordination throughout their care pathway.

Ideally the Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) acts as a key worker who, with the patient's agreement, takes a key role in co-ordinating and promoting continuity in care. But as the CNS is not always involved at diagnosis, they are sometimes contacted for crisis intervention or when a patient is admitted to hospital for treatment, rather than taking a more pro-active approach. Such concerns prompted an evaluation of the current service provision by the project team and informed this service development.

Aim and objectives of the project

The project aimed to ensure that patients who attended for surgical pre-assessment had the opportunity to:

- Have a holistic assessment prior to treatment
- Develop a supportive care pathway and plan to improve communication with other professionals to enhance co-ordination of care across the region

The objectives of the project were to:

- Involve stakeholders in the process of service re-design to ensure that it was responsive to patient need
- Provide a supportive care environment to allow patients the opportunity to verbalise their concerns and commence care planning earlier in their journey
- Pilot the use of a holistic assessment tool to identify patient concerns

Key activities and outcomes from the project

Facilitation of a service user focus group revealed the following key themes; information; co-ordination of care; treatment; therapeutic relationship. This formed the basis for mapping an ideal patient pathway and the development and piloting of a supportive care clinic running in tandem with attendance for pre-operative assessment. Of the 25 patients who presented for pre-operative assessment, 19 attended the supportive care clinic with the CNS. A holistic assessment was completed by 15 patients to identify their concerns during the pre-operative pathway and organise specialist nursing interventions to help address these concerns.

A follow up questionnaire (n=12:19) and facilitated focus group (n=5:19) indicated patients benefitted from supportive one to one discussions with a CNS. Patients identified being overwhelmed by information and needed support after the initial visit to the gynaecological oncology centre. The development of a supportive care clinic identified patient's concerns and informed improvements to their pathway of care. Feedback from patients suggests that the supportive care clinic and holistic assessment enhanced the experience of gynaecological cancer care and it is intended that the initiative will now extend to follow up care.

Implications for practice:

- National best practice guidelines formed the basis for systematic evaluation and redesign of the cancer service involving a range of key stakeholders
- The supportive care clinic was developed in response to patient need and underpinned by national policy directive, but active support from trust board members and the willingness of the nursing and medical team to change was central to success
- Improved documentation has been developed in the form of a care pathway and supportive care plan to promote continuity of care for patients moving through complex health care systems and crossing health care boundaries
- Regular reflection and documenting the experiences of facilitating the project informed this service improvement and helped to maintain stakeholder involvement

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstdid=6835>

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