

MEMBERS' BUSINESS: COLIN SMYTH MARIE CURIE REPORT ON CHALLENGING INEQUALITIES IN PALLIATIVE CARE

Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With around 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

Background

RCN Scotland shares the view of the Marie Curie report 'Challenging inequalities in Palliative Care' that health and social care professionals must ensure people are at the heart of their care by:

- understanding individuals, their social circumstances and previous experience with services
- being aware of barriers to accessibility
- recognising that sometimes people won't be able to comprehend their prognosis or what help is available
- ensuring services are flexible enough to adapt to meet different needs and outcomes.

In 2015 RCN Scotland provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee inquiry 'We need to talk about palliative care'. RCN Scotland's written evidence can be found [here](#).

Overview

Those in need of palliative care should experience a service which is delivered in a timely and seamless manner, accessing care in a coordinated and compassionate way at the end of life.

Complex systems run differently by different care providers can lead to confusion in an already stressful situation for patients and their families. There is only one chance to get end of life care right.

The implementation of health and social care integration should, in time, bring about a more seamless transition between services for those moving between medical care and palliative care and ensure individuals and their families experience a good death.

It is however crucial that integration boards share best practice, and receive the appropriate support, information and advice from other areas across Scotland. This will ensure that patients requiring palliative and end of life care are able to access appropriate care and support no matter who they are or where they live.

It is also vital that the third sector are involved. Health and care teams cannot provide all of the care and support that palliative patients and their families need. It is therefore that the role that the third sector provides must be recognised.

Discussing end of life care

Nurses are seen by the public as being professional and accessible and are well placed to initiate discussions on bereavement and end of life care.

Palliative care is about adopting a comfort approach for the patient which may be required many years before they are actually at the end of their life. In that context it is crucial that people are able to talk more freely about the kind of care that they wish to receive and that their family and carers are a part of that process.

High quality palliative care can help patients and their families to deal with the practical and emotional side of their condition and can help to ensure that the end of life is as peaceful as possible.

Specialist nurses can support discussion with the wider community to raise awareness and help with public messages.

Specialist nurses provide much of the training and education on palliative and end of life care to pre-registration and post registration nursing staff and to non-registered staff. They also provide input to the development of courses both in universities and other settings and are crucial to the development of future education for the nursing workforce.

Delivering end of life care

Nurses, particularly specialist nurses, district nurses and practice nurses working in the community and primary care, are very likely to be the people asked to provide the coordinated care of those who can benefit from palliative and end of life care. They are frequently the main link between the GP, local authority and the patient.

Commissioning and planning end of life care

As significant providers of, and experts in, palliative and end of life care nurses play a key role in helping to inform the commissioning strategy of health and social care partnerships. They also act as advocates for patients and those important to them to ensure that the services that are commissioned meet the needs of the local people who are recipients of the services.

Further information sources

If you would like any further information please contact Sarah Atherton, Parliamentary and Media Officer, by email at sarah.atherton@rcn.org.uk or by telephone 0131 662 6172.