

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

30. Communication with NHS staff

Undergoing treatment for any illness, including cancer, involves a great deal of communication between patients and the professionals caring for them. When this communication goes wrong it can be the source of distress and frustration. Getting it right is the shared responsibility of professionals and patients (as well as their families and loved ones).

At all times people should expect to be treated with dignity and respect. Patients rightly expect professionals to behave professionally and to be caring, honest and trustworthy. Difficulties can arise when staff are poorly trained, rushed or over-stretched and they say something unhelpful, misleading or uncaringly. On rare occasions they can simply make mistakes. Sometimes patients are given different messages from different professionals and this can understandably leave them feeling confused and less safe. At other times they can feel they are being asked to make decisions concerning their treatment that they would rather professionals made for them.

However, problems sometimes occur because patients have misunderstood what they have been told, or are simply not ready to take in all the information that may be available to them. Given the number of possible communication difficulties, it is essential to be clear about the nature of the patient's concerns and the appropriate level of response.

How can I manage this problem?

- If you are unsatisfied with the communication you have had, try to let the person concerned know. Politely explain what you understand and what you don't understand from what you have been told, and how this leaves you feeling. Remember that **if you do not mention your concerns there is a good chance that the staff treating you will assume that all is well.**
- If you are worried about speaking to healthcare staff, bring someone with you so they can help support you. It is very normal for people to do this.
- It is advisable to write down any questions you have before going to your next appointment. You may have questions such as; What happens next? What does the treatment involve and how does it work? What are the side effects of treatment?
- If a member of staff asks you to do something you find difficult, it is better tell them immediately. For example, you could say, "I know that taking these tablets is important but I find it difficult to take them four times a day." This gives the doctor a chance to solve the problem with you.
- If you are phoning the hospital it is worth having your appointment card or letter with you, as the person you speak to may need your hospital number and other details.
- If you find communication difficult, i.e. due to language, hearing or other communication difficulties then be sure to tell the staff concerned because there may be facilities in the hospital to help support you with these difficulties.
- You may find that the information you require is also available from another source such as the information centre in your hospital, or alternatively one of the sources below.
- It is important to understand that not all questions can be answered immediately so be prepared for the fact that you may have to wait for an answer. However if this is the case, be sure that you know how long you can expect to wait, who to contact and how to contact them.
- If you have any remaining problems, concerns or comments about the care or service you have received, then you should contact the Patient Support and Complaints Team (see below), who will treat your concerns in confidence. You can discuss with them how to make a formal complaint if you wish to pursue this option.

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30. Communication with NHS staff - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

<p>Patient Advice and Liaison Services(PALS) Main Foyer beyond the front desk North Devon District Hospital Raleigh Park Barnstaple EX31 4JB Tel: 01271 314090</p>	<p>PALS is a confidential service that provides help, advice and information for patients, families and carers. It also helps to improve the NHS by listening to your concerns and suggestions. The telephone number is the same for the following hospitals: Torrington, Ilfracombe, Bideford, South Molton and Holsworthy.</p>
<p>Other Resources:</p>	<p>Your GP, oncologist, specialist nurse or radiographer</p>

National Resources:

<p>Cancer Research UK, Angel Building 407 St John Street London EC1V 4AD General Enquiries 0300 123 1022 Mon-Fri 8.am—6pm For cancer related queries please call CNS 0808 800 4040 Monday—Friday 9.am—5pm (UK resident only)</p>	<p>National charity that provides a website full of information about the cancer research projects that are going on all over the UK. The helpline is open most of the day but there is also a chat line available online to the Support Services team.</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days a week 8am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support-line</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

Other Resources :
