Additional costs of childhood cancer increase family debt

By Christine Walker
THREE IN FOUR families find childhood cancer a ‘big problem’ for their finances with parents and young people spending an average of £367 and £277 respectively on extra expenses each month.

According to CLIC Sargent, many families face a drop in income because of a reduction in hours worked or have to give up work altogether. A survey, conducted by the charity, found that more than half of the parents surveyed had to take time off as unpaid leave and one in three took unpaid leave for three months or more when the child was diagnosed.

Chief executive Lorraine Clifton said: ‘A particularly concerning finding is that two in three parents surveyed had built up debt as a direct result of the additional costs childhood cancer brings.’

A total of 245 parents with children aged up to 16, and young people aged 16 to 24, took part in the study which consisted of an online and paper survey, focus groups and telephone interviews.

The charity has also welcomed the NHS Future Forum’s second phase report on the future of the NHS which recommends commissioners ensure patients with long-term or complex needs have easy access to a named person or team who can act as co-ordinators for their care. The charity is piloting a key worker-led model at London’s Royal Marsden Hospital and has established the role at other NHS trusts in the UK.

Pseudomonas claims the lives of newborns in Belfast hospital

SINK TAPS in the intensive care area of a neonatal unit were found to contain Pseudomonas aeruginosa that resulted in the death of three babies.

The unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital in Belfast underwent bio-decontamination with taps and related pipes being removed and replaced.

As Nursing Children and Young People went to press a total of seven babies were infected with gram-negative bacterium that lives in soil and water. Three babies had died in the unit and one recovered but later died from unrelated causes.

Northern Ireland health minister Edwin Poots said it was important to learn lessons: ‘In the longer term the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority is considering the most effective way to approach inspections in intensive care settings such as neonatal units.’

End of life tool for recording wishes of young people

CHILDREN AND young people with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will now be able to record their wishes about their treatment and care in a colourful, specially designed booklet.

Launched as part of the NHS Devon, NHS Plymouth and Torbay Care Trusts palliative care charter, the A4-sized bright yellow folder is divided into two parts. Part one questions patients about their condition, what they like and do not like, where they would like to be, and who are the people they trust and would like to share information with. Part two focuses on the end of their life, what they want if they reach that stage and about their funeral.

‘Designed as a tool to be completed with the children’s community nurse, it aims to ensure that the young person’s wishes, not those of their family, are written in the book,’ Project leader Helen McLendon says: ‘We’ve used it for a couple of young people since its launch. They say that it tells them that other children are in the same position, and it asks questions which might be difficult to ask face to face. It almost gives them permission to answer those questions because nobody has to broach the subject.’

Children and nurses are winners in anniversary celebrations

AS PART of its 50th anniversary celebrations the charity Action for Sick Children presented awards to children and nurses at a ceremony at London’s Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

Norah Rees Awards of £500 were presented to Linda Dean, practice educator, of the University of Bedfordshire for her dissertation on exploring the experiences of children who have been nursed on adult wards, and Helen Thorpe, a children’s occupational therapist from De Montfort University, Leicester, for her dissertation on the views of young people in transition from children’s to adult services.

Among the other winners were children who were inpatients in hospitals at the time they entered the charity’s art competition. These included: Amber Wade, aged six, from Essex, Michael Ralph, six, from the Isle of Man who was flown over especially for the event, and Olivia Vickery, 12, from Surrey.