Survey of dying patients proves value of palliative care specialists

By Tamsin Snow

A study that shows care by Marie Curie staff doubles the chance of terminally ill people being able to die at home will be used to lobby the government for investment in specialist end of life care.

The study of 60,000 patients found that more than three quarters of those cared for by the Marie Curie nursing service died at home and only 7.7 per cent died in hospital. In contrast, 34.9 per cent of those cared for by community nurses died at home and 41.6 per cent died in hospital.

The research, commissioned by the charity, also found that those cared for by its 2,000 nursing staff were less likely to use hospital care.

Hospital costs for people cared for by Marie Curie nurses were £1,140 per person, less than for the comparator group of 29,538 people cared for by community nurses.

‘Amazing’ achievement

Although the figure excludes the cost of the charity nurses, Marie Curie claims the cost is still favourable in the last days of life.

Marie Curie director of nursing Susan Munroe said she was ‘amazed’ that the difference in the numbers of home deaths between those receiving community nursing and those in the charity’s care was so marked.

‘This study proves for the first time the significant difference our nurses make. They specialise in end of life care and so are better able to meet the patients’ and family needs, and anticipate and prevent crises that can lead to a hospital admission.’

Ms Munroe said the findings will be used to lobby the Department of Health (DH) to support the shift of end of life care from hospitals to the community and to highlight to commissioners the value of its service. ‘Hospitals are not geared up for people who are dying, they are geared towards saving lives.’

Marie Curie senior healthcare assistant Georgina Clue said: ‘People do not know about our service. Even GPs and some district nurses do not know what resources they have in their area. It can be frustrating when professionals think that there is no other option but to die in hospital.’

A DH spokesperson said: ‘We are making progress. This report adds to the evidence of what works best to support dignified deaths.’

The report, titled The Impact of the Marie Curie Nursing Service on Place of Death and Hospital Use at the End of Life, is available at tinyurl.com/crppdng

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Personalised statements to set out full scope of benefits

NHS nurses in England will be sent personalised online statements setting out the total value of their employment package from June next year.

The Department of Health initiative, which aims to highlight the full scope of NHS employment rewards, will set out basic pay supplements in the 2012/13 financial year and local employee benefits such as access to health and wellbeing services and opportunities for learning and development.

NHS pension scheme members will receive details of accrued pensions, according to a newsletter sent to employers last week by NHS Pensions.

The statements will show employees that they get ‘much more from their employment than basic pay’, the newsletter states.

A paper version of the statements was trialled among nurses at York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in September. NHS Pensions will carry out a second online pilot at up to 15 NHS organisations early next year.

The Welsh Assembly Government has yet to decide whether to send out the statements. Scotland and Northern Ireland have no plans to do so, according to government spokespeople.