Cancer nurses are at breaking point with the number of health and care staff leaving the profession at a ten-year high, a charity has warned.

Macmillan Cancer Support chief nursing officer Claire Taylor called for urgent government action to build England’s NHS cancer workforce as nurses’ job satisfaction and morale plummets. Analysis by the charity shows that 4,378 staff left NHS hospital and community cancer services in the 12 months to September 2022 which, it says, is a ten-year high.

While the cancer workforce has grown around 50% since 2010, it has failed to keep pace with a 191% increase in people being seen by a specialist for suspected cancer.

Ms Taylor said: ‘Working in the NHS as a cancer nurse consultant, I am acutely aware that the ongoing workforce crisis is being felt deeply by cancer nurses up and down the country. ‘The cancer workforce is exhausted and overworked and what’s needed now is government intervention. What are they waiting for?’

Further research from the charity suggests that 25% of people with cancer in England who were diagnosed in the past ten years felt they lacked support from a specialist cancer nurse, rising to 28% of those diagnosed within the past five years and 29% of all people currently undergoing cancer treatment.

NHS cancer waiting times in England are entering their tenth year of decline.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said despite ‘significant progress’, there is more to do to protect staffing levels.

‘The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan will recruit hundreds of thousands more staff and address staff leaving rates, which are already decreasing.’

Find out more at tinyurl.com/NHS-cancer-workforce-data

In brief

Nurses have joined a UK-wide collective of experts, including scientists, artists, palliative care social workers and designers to develop a programme of support for parents living with cancer.

The Fruit-fly Collective aims to build new ways to support children, adults and families affected by cancer through creativity, education, research and communication.

The project aims to ensure support is accessible and inclusive from diagnosis and treatment to recovery or palliative care, regardless of patient postcode.

Using a combination of coaching, training, workshops, and online and in-person support, they will identify the most effective way of supporting a parent with cancer. They also offer training and resources for healthcare professionals. To find out more, visit parentingwithcancer.org and for free training go to tinyurl.com/Event-cancer-patients

Two new continuing professional development webinars with a focus on cancer nursing are available to RCNi subscribers.

The first examines the latest research and clinical guidance on breast cancer care, including genomics and genetic testing, the unmet needs of patients in early and metastatic stages of triple negative breast cancer, and the role of oncology nurses in delivering equal and inclusive breast cancer care by personalising treatment.

The second explores clinical trials in a cancer setting, and how non-research nurses can play a vital role in clinical trials delivery, as well as in cancer research and trial participation.

Cancer Nursing Practice readers can watch two free two-hour sessions at rcni.com/cpd-webinar-breast-cancer and rcni.com/webinar-cancer-trials

Cancer nursing at break point as quit rate hits ten-year high

Macmillan Cancer Support has called for urgent action from government to boost nurse numbers in cancer care

By Andrea Downey X@journoandrea

In brief

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