Extending Support for Those Affected by Head & Neck Cancer

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Description

A patient who had undergone head & neck surgery for oral cancer asked his Speech & Language Therapist to arrange a meeting with a fellow patient in order to gain insight into the challenges of communication and swallowing post surgery. Due to the complex nature of oral surgery, it can be difficult to match patients for peer support.

The Speech & Language Therapist facilitated a successful meeting for the patient with a carefully selected peer which was held in Maggie's Centre, Lanarkshire. Each of these patients live with long term challenges to swallowing and speech as a result of head & neck cancer and each patient felt they benefited from meeting one another.

The success of the contact between the two patients prompted the Speech & Language Therapist and Clinical Nurse Specialist to consider wider support options for patients accessing the Head & Neck Service in NHS Lanarkshire.

All head and neck patients are signposted to Maggie's Lanarkshire for support and excellent links between the two staff groups have been established as a result. Maggie's staff were aware that they were supporting Head and Neck patients on an individual basis but a previously established Head and Neck cancer support group was not being populated as they would hope.

The clinical staff and Maggie's staff worked together and agreed to ‘relaunch’ the Head & Neck support group.

Methodology

• Direct links made with Maggie's Centre to establish options for hosting a regular support group.
• A consultation meeting was set up by the Speech & Language Therapist and Clinical Nurse Specialist who invited selected patients to attend in order to gain patient opinion on aims and goals for the group.
• The recorded outcome of the consultation meeting was that patients requested a monthly meeting which should be open to all patients with Head & Neck Cancer and their family/friends.
• Leaflets were produced by Maggie's to publicise the group.
• Speech & Language Therapists and Clinical Nurse Specialists promoted group at clinical appointments.
• A monthly group was established April 2017.

Aims/Objectives

• To allow patients to access a supportive, non clinical environment where they feel accepted regardless of speech/swallowing issues resulting from Head & Neck cancer treatment.
• To provide patients with regular contact with peers.
• To promote patient wellbeing and independence with the support of trained professionals.
• To allow patients to discuss the challenges they face, acceptance post treatment, share strategies/advice and provide emotional support.
• To provide support for patients beyond the rehabilitation phase with Speech & Language Therapist.
• To encourage the group to evolve to being patient led.

Results/Outcomes

• The group is now scheduled onto Maggie’s Lanarkshire timetable with a monthly established slot.
• The group is now well established with a minimum of 6 participants per month.
• The group has evolved to be more patient led with requests for monthly discussion topics and regular time for peer support.
• Patients completed a feedback questionnaire with positive responses.

H&N Support Group Feedback

“Extremely helpful for all head and neck cancer patients and their partners.”

“Very worthwhile”

“Very welcoming and very useful.”

“Informative and friendly.”

“Very good and helpful.”

“Helpful, informative and friendly”.

“Meeting new friends. Talking and hoping that you have helped”.

“Friendly and full of discussion – plus tips on dealing with situations”.

“Helps to see how others cope”.

“Widely experienced nursing background and compassionate manner”.

“Gives me hope for the future. Inspired by others”.

References

Maggie's Centre, Monklands Head & Neck patients of NHS Lanarkshire