

Queen Margaret team up with Macmillan in training plan

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (QMU) is involved in a ground-breaking partnership which will see people affected by cancer go through formal training to support other patients embarking on treatment.

In collaboration with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Macmillan Cancer Support, QMU is establishing the Scottish Macmillan Centre for Supported Self-management. The £538k project, which will be the first of its kind, will train volunteers who have personal experience of battling cancer, to help others who are fighting the disease.

Health experts from QMU will provide the volunteers, known as The Macmillan Supporters, with formal training which will equip them to effectively support patients embarking on cancer treatment. In the initial pilot project, the Macmillan Supporters will provide patients with support on nutritional care with plans to extend to training in other areas such as radio/chemotherapy, survivorship, rehabilitation, as well as guidance on going through radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Cancer patients would be matched with a volunteer who has experience of a similar type of cancer and is from a similar background.

The project fits well with much of QMU's health research work which focuses on the effectiveness of patient centred care and rehabilitation. This approach, which is now being more broadly embraced by the NHS, encourages and empowers patients to take more control of their treatment potentially freeing up staff time and resources to concentrate on the more complex cancer

cases.

Rosemary Richardson, honorary professor of Dietetics at the School of Health Sciences at Queen Margaret University, is leading the project. Cancer is still one of Scotland's biggest killers with 28,600 new cases each year. One in three Scots will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, so it is essential that organisations work together to look at ways in which patients can be treated more successfully within the confines of limited financial resources.

“By training people to become accredited Macmillan Supporters, we can appropriately help cancer patients take control of their care.

She continued: “The wonderful thing about this project is that it provides patients with the opportunity to speak to someone who has been there – someone who has gone through a similar experience. Sometimes, people appreciate having the chance to hear from someone who has had cancer themselves and how they tackled every day issues, rather than just speaking to medical experts. Having someone to confide in, on a more supportive and casual basis, can also help with feelings of isolation which can occur following a diagnosis of cancer.”

Professor Isobel Davidson, Queen Margaret University Principal Investigator on the project, said: “Much of the research carried out at QMU is demonstrating that, with less severe cases, it is a positive and cost effective move for patients themselves to direct their own care while remaining in the community, rather than being in hospital. By providing access to a responsible and knowledgeable support network – the MacMillan Supporters – patients can be easily equipped with the information and support they need to manage their health and lifestyle. It puts them in the driving seat by providing a

feeling of control.”

“However, in order to achieve these outcomes, it is critical to ensure the quality of training provided to the volunteers.”

The University’s role in the project is to define the quality assurance mechanism for the Macmillan Supporters programme and deliver the training. The first model for development will focus on generic and nutrition training. This model can then be adopted in other related cancer areas such as concomitant radio/chemotherapy or vocational rehabilitation. The University team involved in the development of the training, believes that there is significant potential for transferring this model to assist other groups of people suffering from long term conditions such as diabetes.

Alan Gilloran, Vice Principal (Academic) at Queen Margaret University concluded: “This is an excellent example of the relevance of QMU’s important work in the area of health and rehabilitation and our commitment to working on projects which make a real practical impact on people’s everyday lives.”