

# Specially-trained volunteers to support patients at the end of life



Kieran Dodds/Marie Curie

The award-winning Marie Curie Companions volunteer service provides one-to-one emotional support to patients who are dying, and their families, 365 days a year.

## What need does the service address?

The Musgrove Park Hospital identified a need to spend more time giving emotional support to dying patients and their families but lacked the capacity to do so.

## Benefits to the hospital

- Same-day response from dedicated, specially-trained volunteers who are available between 9am and 9pm, seven days a week
- Quick and easy referral process
- Staff report reduction in stress
- Frees up staff to focus on clinical priorities
- Demonstrates the hospital's commitment to patients' and families' emotional wellbeing.

## Benefits to patients and families

- Patient-centred approach
- Emotional support and comfort for people who are dying
- Emotional support for family members and friends
- Offers families respite, giving them time to deal with other responsibilities
- Volunteers act as advocates for the patient and family.

Highlighted as  
**'outstanding practice'**  
in the 2016 *Care Quality  
Commission Quality Report*

More than **350** patients  
supported by 30 volunteers  
since July 2014

## Winner of Volunteers of the Year Award at the hospital's 2015 achievement awards

### How does the service work?

A pool of 30 volunteers living locally are on an on-call rota, ensuring there's always a volunteer available to provide support as and when it's needed, seven days a week. A quick phone call is all it takes to refer someone and a volunteer can usually arrive within an hour.

All carefully selected Companion volunteers receive specialist training from Marie Curie and hospital staff. This means clinical staff at the hospital can be assured volunteers have the right communications skills and are comfortable in supporting people who are dying and dealing with bereavement.

The support each volunteer provides depends entirely on the needs of the patient and their family. This could mean listening, giving information or simply being with the patient so their loved one can have a break or deal with other commitments, such as picking up children from school.

*"The Marie Curie Companions service is about a community walking a path with people in the last days and hours of their lives, and their loved ones. By offering time, companionship and much-needed emotional support to patients and families, these volunteers also reduce stress among our staff. Their presence on our wards allows nursing staff to focus on all clinical priorities, knowing that that includes the holistic needs of this special group of patients."*

Dr Tom MacConnell, Consultant Cardiologist and End of Life Care Lead at Musgrove Park Hospital

### How does the service add value?

Hospital staff say the service brings value to patients, families and staff. They report feeling reassured when a Marie Curie Companion is with a patient. They appreciate how important it is to give dying patients and their families time and support but say this can be challenging and stressful on a busy hospital ward. The service relieves some of this pressure.

Even if people choose not to use the service, staff see the value of offering it. It shows the hospital has considered the emotional wellbeing of patients and families.

*"On Christmas Eve, one of the nurses explained that the Marie Curie Companions service could provide someone to be with Mum when we couldn't be there. I wanted to stay with her, but I wanted my family to have a happy Christmas too. Going home and knowing someone was with her was so reassuring."*

Amanda Broom, whose mother Joan was supported by the Marie Curie Companions service

## Shortlisted for the National End of Life Safer Patient Award in June 2015

### More information

[mariecurie.org.uk/commissioning](http://mariecurie.org.uk/commissioning)

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Marie Curie is the UK's leading charity caring for people living with any terminal illness, and their families. We offer expert care through our home nursing and hospice services, as well as information and support for patients, their loved ones and the professionals who care for them.