

Volunteers- vital to hospice viability

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Context

Volunteers have played a key role founding and influencing the ongoing development of the independent hospice movement in the UK.^{1,2,3}

Volunteers comprise a large proportion of the workforce and are vital to the delivery of care and support to patients.^{4,5} The time volunteers donate makes a significant economic contribution.⁶

Volunteering, however, is influenced by many external factors, including government policy, changing society⁷ and economic climate. Recent palliative care policy developments have largely ignored the role of volunteers; a significant omission considering their role.

Whilst it is often said to volunteers “we couldn’t do it without you” there is little research evidence to support this. The focus of this study therefore was to explore the relationship between volunteering and organisational sustainability in independent hospices in the UK using a theoretical model, constructed from literature findings.

Purpose of the study

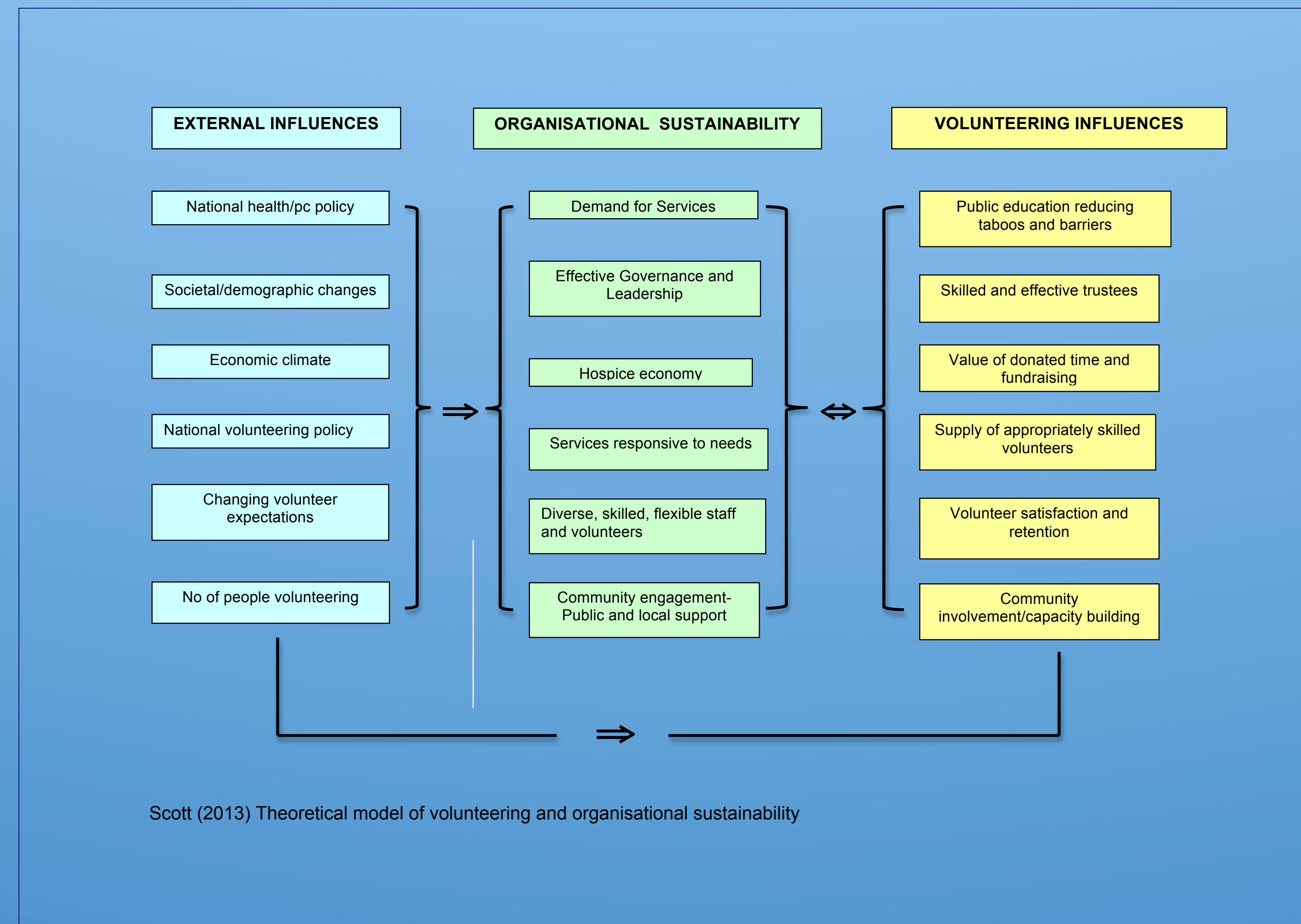
The focus of the study was strategic participants included trustees, senior staff and volunteers from independent hospices in the UK. Data was gathered using an online self-administered questionnaire.

The purpose of the research was to test the applicability of my theoretical model in both adult and children’s hospices in UK by:

- exploring the influence of volunteers on four key organisational sustainability factors: governance, service delivery, hospice economy, and community engagement;
- gaining insight into how volunteering is understood by senior staff, volunteers and trustees;
- considering the relationship between volunteering and hospice sustainability.

A total of 32 hospices (adult and children’s) took part with feedback from 287 respondents comprising trustees, senior staff and volunteers. Ethical approval was gained from the University of Dundee Ethics Committee.

Theoretical model of sustainability



Findings

Findings indicate that volunteers have a significant impact on governance, service delivery, hospice economy and community engagement.

Findings suggest that volunteers:

- are integral to professional team
- are crucial to the quality and range of services
- are important to care of patients
- are also important to the support of families
- contribute significantly to financial success
- play a key role in income generation
- make services viable.

Volunteers were not recognised as important to governance despite their key roles as trustees. Respondents saw volunteers as playing a key role in the integration of services within their local communities.

Volunteers were considered to:

- be important in increasing community engagement
- help to make hospices more accessible/less medical
- help to reduce taboos about death and dying
- increase community capacity to deal with death dying and bereavement
- 98% of respondents stated that they would be unable to provide current services without volunteers.

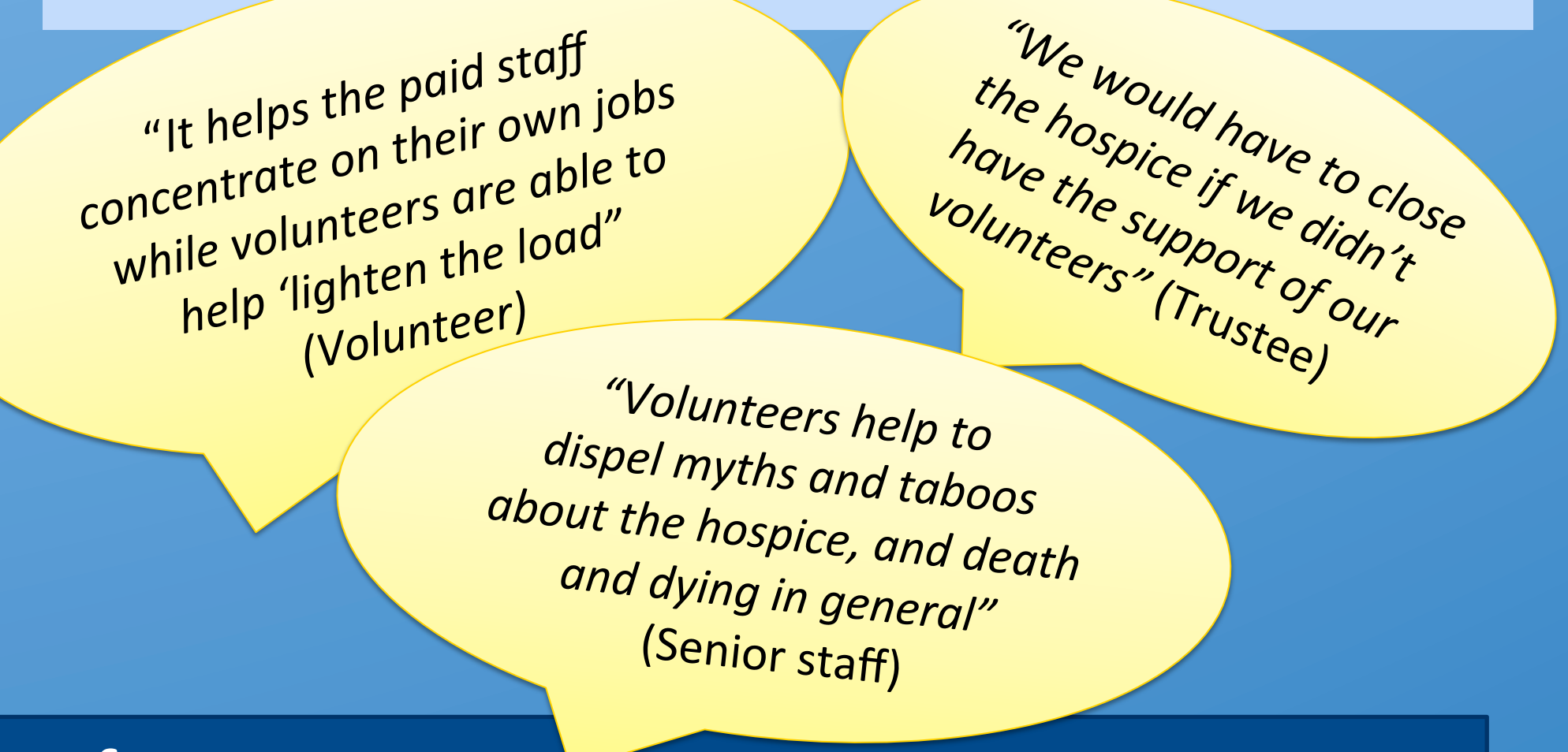
Implications for practice

Hospices:

- Recognise the importance of volunteering as a key element of sustainability and plan for this effectively.
- Ensure the sustainability and quality of volunteering through review and effective resourcing.
- Recognise the key role of volunteers in governance.
- Maximise volunteering for the benefit of patients, families and communities.

Policy makers:

- Recognise volunteering and the unique dimension, quality and added resource which it brings to services.



References

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