

HERE'S MY NUMBER, CALL ME MAYBE?

Developing a Specialist Palliative Care Telephone Advice Line for Healthcare Professionals

AUTHORS

Dr Narmadha Kali Vanan
Dr Rachel Flinn
Advanced CNS Monica Keenan
CNS Gemma McCahill
Mia Quinn
Dr Holly McGuigan

community@ardgowanhospice.org

BACKGROUND

We carried out this project in Ardgowan Hospice, an independent hospice in the West of Scotland, serving a population of over 76,000.(1) Feedback from colleagues in primary care highlighted the need for a dedicated advice line to improve access to specialist palliative care (SPC) and to facilitate timely referrals to our service.

METHOD

Development

- Process mapping to understand existing steps between receiving a call and feedback to the patient's parent team
- Team decision that we would take referrals via the SPC helpline
- We developed a proforma on our patient record system (Crosscare) for documentation purposes, alongside using a virtual landline platform
- Either a Specialty Doctor, Clinical Fellow, Advanced CNS or CNS holds the helpline, Monday to Friday 0900-1700. A Consultant is always available for advice if required.
- We shared the helpline number with our colleagues in primary and secondary care with posters, business cards and by email.

Evaluation

- We analysed data from the virtual landline platform and Crosscare for: total number of calls and referrals generated, referral sources, patient demographics and outcomes.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

The helpline has been an amazing development for our team working with the hospice. We can literally lift the phone on busy wards and refer patients who either need admission or are going home and need hospice CNS input. This saves populating forms and allows us time to be with patients. The phonenumber is so responsive and helpful. We have successfully shared this with our colleagues in acute and people have commented on how user friendly this is.

- Hospital Palliative Care CNS

I link with this service weekly and accessibility has improved vastly. I know even if it's the smallest question, that I can call and they will assist me.

- District Nurse

Having a helpline that district nurse prescribers can contact for advice has been valuable.

- District Nurse

Love it, good to get it right from the outset rather than stumbling about and having to rectify it later.

- GP

Quick response and communication has been excellent. Able to feedback to team, patient and their family and guide decision making.

- Hospice CNS based in community

RESULTS: FEB TO AUG 2023



330 contacts



199 patients
115 of these were new referrals



55 contacts were triaged as being appropriate for hospice admission



130 contacts were triaged as being appropriate for community palliative care team review



143 contacts were for specialist palliative care advice

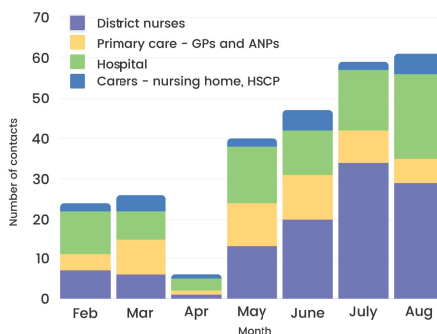


Figure 1: Number of helpline contacts, divided into HCP groups by month

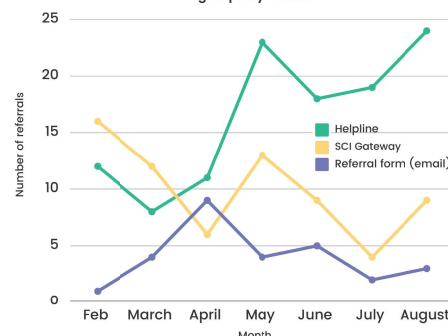


Figure 2: Number of referrals received, differentiated by method by month

The number of contacts via the helpline has increased over these months. District nurses form the largest proportion of helpline users, followed by hospital teams, as per Figure 1.

Professional carers employed by the local Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and nursing homes are a new group that we have been able to engage with. Prior to the introduction of the helpline, professional carers and district nurses were unable to seek direct SPC advice or make a referral to our team without going via the patient's GP.

The preferred method of referral to our team is the helpline, as shown in Figure 2. We have noted a downward trend in referrals via alternative routes.

The overall number of referrals to our team has increased over these months. Having conversations with our referrers has allowed us to offer proactive reviews, encouraging early SPC involvement.

The helpline has allowed us to triage referrals efficiently to aid prioritisation. This has been instrumental in effective team coordination and resource allocation across both the community and inpatient team.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This SPC advice line has improved access to SPC advice and streamlined our referral process. We aim to extend the advice line beyond 0900-1700 Monday to Friday and quality improvement around widening access to SPC.