

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Psychological support for families and children when a parent has cancer



NHS

Introduction

Within the Adult Psychological Support Service, we specifically aim to support patients with cancer who have dependent children (aged 17 years or younger). This leaflet explains what we can offer, how the service benefits patients with young families, and how patients can access the service.

When a parent has cancer

Cancer has a big effect on all family members, including children. It can disrupt family life. Families have to adjust to new routines, and find ways to cope with the worry and uncertainty that comes with a serious illness.

When a family member has cancer, it affects how parents and children feel. Parents often report how hard it is to know how best to support their children, especially when they also have to cope with their illness, their treatment and their own feelings.

Supporting patients with young families

We offer an initial meeting with parents to establish what family support is needed. Meetings for the whole family, including children or young people, often follow this.

We also offer individual or couple-based support to parents, as well as individual meetings with children and young people.

We have family and child friendly meeting rooms.

How we can help

We consider the individual needs and circumstances of all family members. This includes the various ages and developmental stages of the children.

The aim is to work with each family to help them support and listen to each other. Our approach is to help families focus on the strengths and positive aspects of family life, whilst acknowledging how overwhelming some difficulties can be.

We offer a place where family members can come and talk about their experiences. We encourage all family members to ask questions, talk about problems, explore ways of coping, and share feelings.

We try to create opportunities that support communication between parents and children, because children often have questions and worries about their parent's illness, but do not always feel able to talk to their parents about their concerns.

We keep what you say to us private (confidential). The only exception to this is if we think that you or someone else is at risk of harm, and then we need to share this information.

We can offer advice on books and websites that help explain the illness and medical processes to children and young people, and which are relevant to their age and level of understanding.

We can help with informing and liaising with children's schools.

We can help make onward referrals to other support services on behalf of children and the family.

How can I access the service?

Patients and families can contact us directly. To do this, please contact us on the telephone numbers below between Monday and Friday during office hours: 9am–5pm. Outside of these hours you can leave a message on our answer machine, and we will return your call.

Alternatively, please ask the doctor, nurse or healthcare professional treating you to refer you to the service.

Contact details

Sutton:

Compton House
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
Downs Road, Sutton, Surrey SM2 5PT

Tel: 020 8661 3006

Chelsea:

Floor 1, Markus Unit
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
Fulham Road, London, SW3 6JJ

Tel: 020 7808 2777

Email: Psychological.SupportAdmin@rmh.nhs.uk

Notes and questions

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre
Freephone: 0800 783 7176
Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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