

The Development of Professional Skin Cancer CNS Support Group

Skin cancer remains the 'Cinderella' of cancers, despite the increase in statistics.

There remains increasing interest, support and media attention for other cancers (eg breast, ovarian). In any department store you can buy a 'badge' showing you support a specific cancer. CRUK produced SunSmart badges (available from Boots) but they are not as popular or as well 'established' as other charity badges – badges for malignant melanoma need to be produced.

If you were to read a directory of cancer groups, you would find several pages of support / self-help groups for all cancers, however, to date, there remains only one national telephone helpline for skin cancer – MARC's Line, based in Salisbury Hospital.

Whilst Marc's Line supports patients, carers and families who have been given a skin cancer diagnosis, there remains very little support for Skin Cancer CNS's. These nurses are dedicated in developing their role by providing patients with psychological and psychosocial support, information, advice and counselling. They also have a responsibility developing and providing education programmes on early recognition, self-examination and sun safety projects for HCP and the general public.

The skin cancer CNS is usually a 'sole' worker. When new in post, it is common to experience difficulties. Until she has become established she may feel she is providing a 'fragmented' service. She will frequently encounter a 'lack of interest' shown in her speciality from other professionals. Additionally there is no-one to whom she can turn to so as to seek advice, share experiences or obtain support.

During the summer months I received a telephone call from a CNS who was desperate for information and advice for a young person diagnosed with cancer. I also received three emails from newly appointed CNS's asking for advice, information, resources and support to enable them to be successful with development and co-ordination of their skin cancer services. They asked for CNS's contacts, working in the same specialist areas as themselves, as they wished to meet up to find out, for example, what patient information literature was needed, what the CNS's expectations were and 'links' to whom they could discuss and share sensitive issues with.

The lack of support and specific 'needs' of these professionals was behind the rationale that 'spurred' me into action. I realised there was an obvious lack of support for these lone workers and felt it necessary to fill this 'void.' I thought of starting up a professional support group for CNS's working in skin cancer.

I made 'tentative' enquiries at the MSG meeting, held in Southampton 2006 by asking some nurses present if they would be interested in joining a new National Professional Support Group for Skin Cancer CNS's. I received

positive and encouraging responses – and showed enthusiasm about the development of this group.

Consequently, I sent out invitation letters and application forms. Within a very short time I had received 48 completed applications along with some excellent suggestions for the agenda of the meeting.

Our first meeting was held at St Helier Hospital, Carshalton, Surrey on Monday 25 September 2006. CNS's working in dermatology, surgery, oncology and plastic surgery departments attended.

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