



World Cancer Day 2024 - Reflections on the year, and our new Cancer Strategy

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Hello, my name is Michelle Davies and I have had the privileged position of being the Associate Director of Nursing for Cancer at Stockport NHS Foundation Trust for the past 12 months. I began my nursing career in 1990 and throughout my career, have worked almost exclusively in oncology. I'm pleased to say that during that time I have seen many positive and extraordinary developments in cancer. However, those improvements are not the same across all types of cancer or for every person affected by cancer.

February 4th is World Cancer Day, a global uniting initiative led by the Union for International Cancer Control. The theme for this year's World Cancer Day is "Close the Care Gap", with a focus on influencing leaders locally, nationally, or internationally, to make a commitment to prioritise cancer and reducing inequality in cancer care.

I wanted to take the opportunity on World Cancer Day to write some of my personal reflections during my first year as Lead Cancer Nurse for Stockport, as well as highlight some of the exciting plans we have for the year ahead.

Stepping Hill Hospital, run by Stockport NHS Foundation Trust, provides a variety of cancer services for Stockport residents and for our neighbouring areas of High Peak and East Cheshire. These include assessment and diagnostics for urgent suspected cancers. We provide specialist surgery in Urology and Colorectal as well as providing chemotherapy and other systemic anti-cancer therapies (SACT) on our Chemotherapy and Haematology day case unit, the Laurel suite. We provide personalised support and care for patients before, during and after treatment ensuring patients are offered a Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA) and a personalised care plan. Many nurses, doctors, allied health professionals and support workers all contribute to the delivery of the broad range of cancer services we provide with leadership provided by myself as Lead Cancer Nurse, and my colleagues Jo Pemrick, our Cancer Services Manager and James Dyer, our Cancer Lead Clinician.

When I joined Stockport just over a year ago, I was excited and apprehensive. Excited by the prospect of what we could achieve in terms of improving cancer services, but apprehensive due to the many pressures and competing demands being seen across the NHS particularly for acute general hospitals.

My first six months in post has been taken up with understanding the vast number of cancer services on site, where they sit within the organisation, the many staff that are either directly or indirectly responsible for their delivery and how all of that fits within the wider complexities of the hospital. My priorities in the first few months have focused on building relationships and trust with colleagues I work collaboratively with and support.

Getting to know the colleagues I have professional responsibility for within my role, the Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) and the Cancer Care Co-ordinators (CCC) has been a real privilege. I have been immensely proud to meet so many talented and compassionate individuals who make up this workforce and to deepen my understanding of the crucial contribution these important staff make for our cancer patients and their families.

The role of the CNS is often misunderstood, not just in Stockport but also nationally. There can be a perception that a Cancer CNS is only needed to provide emotional support to patients. In fact, the reality is that this role is a complex, safety critical, clinical role. The CNS will develop a deep understanding of a particular area of cancer and provide crucial care to patients at every stage of their pathway, often preventing unnecessary admissions to hospital, supporting patients with complex side effects. Many CNSs have advanced clinical skills and undertake complex procedures or nurse led consultations. I made a commitment early on to ensuring the critical role of the cancer CNS was understood across the organisation. I have taken every opportunity to fly the flag for this essential workforce and make sure that all my colleagues appreciate and understand the importance of the CNS role. This is critical so that we can retain the talented and experienced nurses we have but also attract new, ambitious nurses into a career in cancer. I want to do everything possible to increase the diversity of the cancer nursing workforce so that the workforce of the future is representative of the community it serves.

I also want to take the time to talk about the exceptional Cancer Care Co-ordinators we have here in Stockport. Prior to starting this job, I had never worked directly with a CCC. It is a relatively new role nationally and has been introduced across the NHS over the last 5 years to increase the support available for patients with cancer. CCCs are not clinically trained and are support workers who work hand in hand with the CNSs. They undertake a Holistic Needs Assessment, spending time with patients, either face to face or on the telephone, to really understand every aspect of support that may benefit that patient. They will then sign post and co-ordinate access to vital services such as financial advice, emotional, spiritual or psychological support. At Stockport, we are lucky to be able to provide CCC support to all of our teams, this then allows the CNS teams more time to undertake some of the more complex clinical work which is so important.

It has been a really busy 12 months and in addition to providing senior professional leadership and support to my CNS and CCC colleagues, I have spent valuable time building relationships and participating in meetings and workshops with colleagues across the Greater Manchester Cancer Alliance (GM Cancer). This has provided me with opportunities to take forward a great many projects that will ultimately improve the care our patients receive.

As personalised care lead for the Trust, I have focused on a few key areas. One priority has been working with teams to ensure all staff are recording important work such as HNA's,

care plans and other activities onto the Somerset Cancer Registry system, this pulls through to the Cancer Outcomes and Services data set (COSD) which is the national standard for collecting data in the NHS. This is important as it provides key stakeholders both within and outside the organisation with assurance that important for cancer patients are being provided. Another digital development which sits within the personalised care agenda is to move cancer patients in follow up onto personalised plan of care depending on the risk of their cancer coming back in the future, patients at lower risk can have fewer appointments and those at higher risk can be seen more frequently. A digital system to ensure patients are not lost in the general NHS systems is being introduced across GM.

Lastly, I want to mention another vital national initiative, the **Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development (ACCEND)** program. ACCEND aims to provide transformational reform and end to end support for cancer career pathways, associated education, learning and development. It aims to improve recruitment, retention and opportunities for the non-medical cancer workforce. The ACCEND framework was produced in collaboration with many key stakeholders including cancer charities, academic institutions, nursing and cancer societies and cancer experts. The importance of this framework is reflected by its inclusion in the recently published NHS long term workforce plan.

At Stockport we have been privileged to have one of our Cancer CNSs Rebecca Costello, undertake a two day per week secondment with GM Cancer, working with a team of dedicated staff to pilot opportunities to implement the ACCEND framework locally and share best practice and learning across the region and nationally. One of the initiatives we have been able to implement locally is the development of a cancer specific student placement at Stockport. While the pilot has been small scale, it has already been a huge success with incredible positive feedback from students who have valued the opportunity to experience the range of cancer services available across the Trust.

I hope that provides a flavour of some of the great work happening every day here at Stockport. We are proud of our staff and the services and care we offer, but we are always looking for ways to improve, from the simplest ideas to embracing more complex innovation and change.

As a local resident of Stockport, I joined the Trust to bring my passion and commitment for improving cancer services to my local area. In my first year, I have only really scratched the surface and recognise, along with my colleagues that there is still much work to do. I'm delighted to say, this is the reason we have begun work on developing the first Cancer strategy for Stockport. So please take 5 minutes to provide your valuable ideas and views as to what you think is important for our local cancer strategy. You can access the questionnaire at the link below.

<https://forms.office.com/e/wHas5iqBS5>

Thank you for taking the time to read my reflections of what has been an exciting, sometime difficult, but always rewarding 12 months at Stockport NHS Foundation Trust.