

P93

DIVERSIFYING VOLUNTEER ROLES THROUGH THE 'FAMILY FRIEND' SUPPORT SERVICETina Roberts, Andrew Thompson *Prospect Hospice, Swindon, UK*

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Introduction Serious illness brings stressful changes for patients and carers. Consultation with our carers identified a 'gap' between medical and social care, indicating regular help within the home would sustain coping. Locally, reduced employment opportunities harnessed to Big Society thinking, means there is greater capacity for volunteers to bring their individual skills to support patients' families.

Aims

- ▶ Introducing a new role whereby volunteers provide individualised carer support within the home.
- ▶ Creating a robust and comprehensive training programme to support volunteer autonomy.

Research methods

- ▶ Informal interviews with carers.
- ▶ Multi-disciplinary team's identification of carers' needs.
- ▶ Qualitative research within hospice sector - indicating concern over health and safety issues.
- ▶ Discussion and partnership with local Carer Liaison team.

Results

- ▶ A successful proposal to local NHS Trust secured full funding for 1 year.
- ▶ Dedicated co-ordinator input enabled the implementation of a robust training programme and supporting policies.
- ▶ Development of a comprehensive risk assessment covering a broad range of supportive activities for volunteers to undertake.
- ▶ Family Friend volunteers express increasing confidence through required monthly support group meetings.

Discussion With the project active for a full year, it has been formally evaluated with encouraging feedback. Volunteers state that they value working with greater autonomy and express increased role satisfaction. Carers have identified Family Friend support as contributory towards greater coping and confidence. The service's success is attributed to our ability to identify a shortfall in carer support and our faith in skilled and trained volunteers to meet it.

Conclusion The hospice believes that diversifying the volunteer role and providing enhanced training and supervision has increased satisfaction for volunteers, patients and families. This information could be used by hospices concerned about managing risk in home support volunteering.