Nutritional needs and eating on a budget
Fatigue management
Developing coping skills.

Having a carer specific group allows the sharing of practical ideas and personal experience, as well as hospice staff being able to promote good practice, providing a forum for carers to engage with hospice services earlier for them and their families.

The three-week course is run every third month; each session lasting 90 minutes, enabling delivery to five cohorts per year. Between 2015 and 2016 the course was delivered to 70 carers.

Feedback gained following sessions suggested that the support and advice delivered was specific to their needs and delivered at the correct time to enhance confidence in their caring role when supporting their loved ones at the end of their lives. The course has been commissioned for a further 12 months by the Local Authority.

We have developed the scope of the Share and Care service to include a more informal drop-in service for carers supported by local carer support agencies known as “Carers’ Retreat”, supporting 85 carers in the last 12 months.

Carers play a vital role in managing issues for patients with life-limiting illnesses and the group provides practical support with this. Additionally it allows earlier access to more traditional hospice services whilst challenging stigma around the role of hospice care.

The focus group ascertained that hospices are confidently providing therapeutic activities, however, they were less confident that hospices provide sufficient information, training and education and supportive activities for carers.

**Outcome** The group agreed to produce a minimum standard for specialist palliative care providers/hospices in meeting carers’ needs.

**Minimum standard for supporting carers by specialist palliative care providers/hospices**

- Signpost those early in the trajectory to partner organisations
- Young carers
- Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool
- Moving and handling, the case towards the end of life and Caring in Confidence courses
- Leaflets and website
- Financial or benefit advice
- Supportive activities
- Therapeutic activities.

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**THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF PROVIDING A CARER SUPPORT PROGRAMME TO INFORMAL CARERS WITHIN A HOSPICE ENVIRONMENT SETTING**

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In 2015, five hospice representatives across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire met as a ‘meet and finish’ group to review the service that hospices and palliative care providers give to carers.

The aims of the group were to identify:

- Gaps in provision
- Types of assessment tools used
- Key learning from other services
- The need for services to collectively to reach more people.

The types of hospice support group were also engaging with different types of carers meeting the needs of different carers such as: young carers, carers of children, family carers, carers of older people, carers of people with life-limiting illnesses and people with learning disabilities.

The types of hospice support group for adult carers were identified in a number of ways. To encourage positive dynamics group size was kept between eight – 10 people. Sessions ran over six weeks, supported by two volunteers and the facilitators. These were generally employees so were cost neutral. Leaflets were sourced on a variety of topics relevant to carers.

**Results** The pilot programme was undertaken with very positive feedback from carers and staff involved. The sessions were scored on a scale of 0–10. Average scores ranged between 8.2–9.5. This allowed sharing of information, peer support and awareness of the different support services available to them.

**Conclusion** Following the pilot session, the second course was planned having made adjustments based on the feedback received from carers. Equally this session evaluated positively and we now run the course twice a year. The first carers’ group still met informally and have attendees of future sessions join them.