Dispelling the myths about Hospice Care

There is a perception about hospices that they focus only on end of life care for people with cancer. We at the Branch are very aware that this is far from true and we know that many people living with MND benefit from the services they offer, throughout the course of their illness.

With this in mind, we invited Jenny Draper, then Clinical Nurse Specialist at the Meadow House Day Hospice, to speak at one of our open meetings. This article gives a summary of what she had to say.

Meadow House provides both in-patient and community support and they have plenty of experience of people with MND. The day hospice is open three days a week, Tuesday to Thursday, serving people with palliative care needs, where a cure is not an option. Some will have only a short time left, the prognosis for others is longer and there is no limit to the length of time someone can benefit from the hospice’s support. Emphasising this point, Jenny said, “Referral to a hospice doesn’t mean your life is limited to a certain period of time. Some of our patients have been known to us for many years”.

15 patients attend the day hospice each day and are cared for by a nurse-led team of two nurses and a healthcare assistant. They also have access to a medical team and speech and language, physio- and occupational therapists. Alternative therapies such as reflexology and massage are on offer, as are psychological and multi-faith spiritual support, as required. A huge team of volunteers helps to ensure all runs smoothly, all believing that, as Jenny said, “simple things in life make a real difference”.

There is easy access to an award-winning garden, which is very much appreciated by those who might otherwise be housebound. There is also an opportunity to help care for the garden, where the raised beds can be tended by people in wheelchairs. This is just one of the many activities that are available throughout the day, always accompanied by plenty of food and drink. Sharing lunch, in a restaurant-style environment, gives a chance to socialise and food can be specially prepared for individual needs. And it’s easy to get around in one of the hospice’s riser-recliner chairs on wheels.

Staff ensure that the atmosphere is warm and light-hearted but, at the same time, they are keeping a careful eye on how people are and any changes since their previous visit, so that they can be certain patients are receiving appropriate care. It’s a good and safe environment in which to discuss any problems or concerns.
The inpatient unit has 15 bedrooms, each with private bath, Sky TV and a fridge and everyone has their own room. Some rooms have patio access to the garden. Family can visit and stay on Z-beds. People might come in to the hospice for symptom management, for example problems with swallowing or pain control, and when these issues have been resolved, they go home. They may be staying for respite care, giving their carers the chance of a break. Or they may have come to the hospice for end of life care.

After GP referral, a Community Specialist Palliative Care Nurse visits a patient at home to assess their needs. Unsurprisingly, the day hospice is popular and there can be a waiting list, so it’s worth speaking to your GP ahead of when you think you may want to go. For more information on Meadow House, visit www.meadowhousehospice.org.uk.

Meadow House is available to people living in the boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow. Similar services are available from hospices in all the other boroughs within the Branch area. Your GP can advise on what is available and make referrals for you. To find details of your nearest hospice, visit www.helpthehospices.org.uk