Why are hospices interested in end of life issues and supporting public awareness raising?

Hospices engage with people around end of life care issues every day. Many of these people are patients and carers who need support at the end of life or who are bereaved. In the main they are glad to have the support and care they receive from the hospice, but many people with life limiting illness are anxious about their first contact with a Hospice, as it represents an acceptance of the future and they may feel that by making contact, they are somehow “bringing death nearer”. Once people are linked into Hospice services, many express surprise at how positive the experience is, and reflect that they wish they had engaged sooner.

By communicating with the public about end of life care issues, hospices can help to reduce the stigma for their service users of being in the situation with which they are faced. If talking about death and dying becomes part of life, people at the end of life and the bereaved will be better supported and are more likely to get the care and support that they want.

Hospice staff and volunteers bring:
- Expertise and skills in talking about difficult issues
- Experience of what the end of life might be like
- An understanding of the things that people are concerned about and may want to discuss
- Stories from patients and carers about what can go well and what can go not so well

How are they engaged with the public on this issue?
- Posters and leaflets about services in doctors’ surgeries and hospitals, and in their charity shops
- Hospice websites outlining services and information for professionals
- Doctors and nurses working out in the community, talking to patients, carers and members of the public
- Fundraisers participating in and organising community events meeting thousands of people each year
- Public Relations or Communications expertise to promote events
- Speaking at meetings, conferences, clubs and associations, schools and places of worship
- Planning Dying Matters week activities
- Using Dying Matters materials to support others in having conversations
- Working with other organisations to raise the profile of end of life care issues
What approaches and activities would interest hospices?

Most hospices would welcome the opportunity of working with others to raise awareness about end of life issues. Some examples might be:

- Work with staff based at your local hospice to organise a road show in a local shopping centre inviting the public to talk about issues at the end of life.
- Run an education event for GPs or District Nurses around communication skills at the end of life or advance care planning.
- Examples of good practice of working with other sectors and/or current awareness raising activities on end of life issues that others can learn from.
- If you are a school, work with your local hospice to arrange an arts project with children working alongside patients in their day care unit. The children could explore the patients’ lives and talk about what is important to them in their own.

Example

Greenwich & Bexley Community Hospice working with Crown Woods School

Last year for Dying Matters Awareness Week, Greenwich & Bexley Community Hospice worked with young people from Crown Woods School in Eltham, London to produce a film called “Teens talk about Dying Matters”. Three staff from the hospice went down to the school and spent time talking about “why dying matters”; the conversation was filmed and edited into a short film which was shown at Charlton Athletic Football Club during Dying Matters Awareness Week. After working with the hospice in the school, the young people came down to the hospice and spent time in day care chatting to patients. This provided valuable experience for them in talking to older people and learning about health care services.

The film has subsequently been published via the hospice’s YouTube Channel, publicised in the local media and shown at City Hall and at national awareness raising events. The work with the school continues this year.

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Useful weblinks:
www.helpthehospices.org.uk
www.childhospice.org.uk