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Media Release

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Dying Matters Week – Are we ready? ...

The importance of holding end of life conversations – talking about death, dying and bereavement – is highlighted in a series of events being organised by the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust and Dorothy House Hospice Care to support Dying Matters Awareness Week (13-19 May).

The focus of Dying Matters Week 2019 is ‘Are We Ready?’ encouraging each of us to consider if we are prepared for the practical, emotional and even spiritual elements of death.

Helen Meehan, RUH Lead Nurse for Palliative Care and End of Life, said: “Dying Matters is not just about a person’s final days of life. It’s about the weeks, months and years before, and it’s really important for staff to be aware and understanding of the needs of people however close they are to the end of life.”

The first event at the RUH, on Monday 13 May, is a ‘See It My Way’ session for staff to hear from guest speakers about their own personal experience of the loss of a loved one.

The week, which is supported by the RUH’s charity The Forever Friends Appeal, will also see the official launch of the Compassionate Companions Service, a partnership between Dorothy House Hospice Care and the RUH. Specially-trained volunteers will offer support, compassionate listening, comfort and companionship to patients in their last days of life at the hospital.

Wendy Meilton, Companions Service Lead at Dorothy House Hospice Care said: “We are delighted that the hospice is able to provide this vital end of life support for patients and their families in collaboration with the RUH. Our role is to train hospice volunteers in patient support techniques and co-ordinate their work in the Compassionate Companions Service at the hospital.”

Helen Meehan said: “The service will support volunteers to be with patients on our wards. Being able to provide comforting words or to hold their hand is very much the support these patients need at this time. It will also give families the chance for some respite during what is an emotionally and physically exhausting time.”

End of life care at the RUH has been rated outstanding by the Care Quality Commission in its latest inspection report in 2018. The service has also been recognised by the Royal College of Physicians as one of four English hospitals leading the way in supporting end of life care and talking honestly and openly about death.

The College cited the Trust as a good practice case study for its initiative ‘The Conversation Project’ which was set up over five years ago. The project aims include earlier recognition of patients with end of life needs, to improve communication to understand what is important to the patient, and to improve information sharing and planning ahead for end of life.

Resources are available at the Trust to support staff who provide compassionate end of life care. These include information leaflets to support those making end of life decisions, and Comfort Boxes on wards with practical items such as tissues, wash bags, flasks for family members wishing to stay overnight.

The Chaplaincy team has helped to arrange marriages at short notice under a special license for patients nearing the end of life. The RUH palliative care team has also created special wedding boxes that contain bunting, fairy lights, two ceramic hearts as a keepsake gift, flowers, bubbles, a wedding card and a gift bag, which the wards can request to support the marriage of a couple when time is so precious.

Dying Matters Awareness Week at the RUH will also include a book club discussion on the international bestseller ‘Being Mortal’ by Atul Gawande, and an opportunity at the Spiritual Care Centre for staff to reflect, listen and talk about end of life care and spirituality.

On Saturday 18 May a Service of Reflection for anyone who has been affected by the loss of a baby, and the dedication of a remembrance garden, will be held at Haycombe Cemetery in Bath.

For more information see <https://www.dyingmatters.org/AwarenessWeek>

Ends

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Notes to Editor:

The Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust provides acute treatment and care for a catchment population of around 500,000 people in Bath, and the surrounding towns and villages in North East Somerset and Western Wiltshire. The hospital provides healthcare to the population served by four Clinical Commissioning Groups: Bath & North East Somerset CCG, Wiltshire CCG, Somerset CCG and South Gloucestershire CCG.

The Trust provides 759 beds and a comprehensive range of acute services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

In 2015 The Royal United Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust acquired the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (RNHRD) NHS Foundation Trust. The RNHRD treats patients from across the country offering services in rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME, cancer related fatigue and fatigue linked to other long term conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

The RUH is changing - we have an exciting programme of redevelopment underway transforming our site and further improving the services we provide. The Trust is now building a purpose-built RNHRD and Therapies Centre and working towards new Dyson Cancer Centre. For more details visit:
www.ruh.nhs.uk/about/fit_for_the_future

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk