

Communications Department
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PRESS RELEASE

£385,000 in Benefits for RUH Cancer Patients

A staggering £385,000 has been raised in the last year for cancer patients at the Royal United Hospital by benefits advisers funded by Macmillan Cancer Support. The two advisers, Karen Gough and Jan Letchford, work at Bath Citizens Advice Bureau and visit people diagnosed with cancer at the RUH to offer advice on a number of issues including welfare rights. They have seen nearly 300 people since the service was set up 18 months ago.

One of the advisers, Karen Gough, says that cancer is not just a huge physical and emotional blow

‘a cancer diagnosis is devastating on its own, but combined with the financial worries that often follow due to reduced income the double whammy effect throws people into absolute panic. They are thrown into the unknown – a whirl of hospital visits and the black hole of a benefit system which is a complete mystery to them. Our role is to hold their hand through the latter to enable them to focus on the former’

The advisers don’t just help people navigate the benefits system – they also offer help with managing debt, unemployment, housing problems and budgeting.

The service is available to all RUH cancer patients – this covers people living in BANES, Gloucester, Wiltshire and parts of Somerset.

Forty five year old single mum, Jo Buckett, from Frome is one of the patients Karen Gough has helped recently. Diagnosed with breast cancer over a year ago, she says her life was thrown into total disarray when she became ill.

“When I heard I had cancer, I was really worried about being unable to keep up my mortgage repayments and losing my house. Karen has provided me with a phenomenal service. She helped me sort out my entitlements to Working Tax Credit and Disability Living allowance. She also helped me get a reduction on my fuel bills and got me a grant which helped towards my sons’ school uniform. I could not have got through this whole experience without her – she is one of my absolutely ‘star’ people”.

Twenty seven year old Jim Henderson from Dilton Marsh in Wiltshire was also given advice by Karen. He was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the oesophagus in July 2007. Karen helped Jim and his partner Nick Pearce with claims for Disability Living Allowance and Working Tax Credit. Jim, sadly, died at Dorothy House in January 2008. Nick says Karen has been a pillar of support:

“She came to our home, and made us feel that someone was looking out for us. Without her we wouldn’t have known half of what was available to us. We were too overwhelmed with the illness and issues like eight lots of medication a day – she made everything happen. She has also stayed in touch with me since Jim’s death to offer her support. It’s an absolutely essential service”.

As well as steering patients through the benefits maze – the advisers can help them access special “one-off” grants from Macmillan. These are often for items which can improve quality of life and even include funding for a holiday.

There are currently over 40 Macmillan benefit advisers working across the UK. Rachel Barnes, Regional Communications Officer from Macmillan Cancer Support said, ‘At Macmillan we have done plenty of research into the issues facing people living with cancer, and finances always come very high up on the list of concerns. This is why we are involved in funding roles like Karen’s in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau at the RUH. The fact that they have managed to secure £385,000 in benefits just goes to show what a valuable resource they are to local people affected by cancer.’

ENDS

Editors Notes

- Karen Gough or Jan Letchford are contactable at Bath CAB on 01225 303820.
- Jo Buckett and Nick Pearce (quoted in release) are contactable via Brigid Devlin, RUH Communications Office – 01225 821299
- Bath Cancer Support Group funds a Cancer Information Centre at the RUH which is open 5 days a week. Tel: 01225 834049.
- In 2007 the RUH diagnosed 2059 new cancers (excluding recurrences). For breakdown of types of cancer, see table below.

Cancer Type	Number of New Cases
Upper GI	163
Colorectal	265
Paediatrics	11
Breast	357
Lung	211
Brain	0
Skin	64

Urology	500
Gynaecology	169
Head and Neck	69
Haematology	248
Sarcoma	1
Other	1

Ends

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