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Media Release

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Compassionate Companions for End of Life Care

A new volunteer service offering support, compassionate listening, comfort and companionship to patients in their last days of life has launched at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust (RUH).

The Compassionate Companions Service is a joint partnership between Dorothy House Hospice Care and the RUH – organisations that are both rated outstanding in end of life care by the Care Quality Commission.

The service has been funded for three years by the Sperring Trust, the legacy of Midsomer Norton builder Ralph Sperring, who left his estate to benefit the local community.

At the launch, RUH Director of Nursing and Midwifery Lisa Cheek thanked the Sperring Trust, Dorothy House and the RUH Palliative Care and End of Life Team for all of their hard work to establish the Compassionate Companions Service.

Helen Meehan, Lead Nurse, Palliative Care and End of Life Team said: "I have always felt privileged to work in end of life care. I believe that our final hours are as precious as our first. Compassion underpins everything we do and this service will allow volunteers to be on our wards, providing patients with comforting words, a listening ear or to hold their hand – the support these patients very much need. It will also give families the chance for some respite during what is an emotionally and physically exhausting time."

Guests at the event heard from Susie Slade, RUH Respiratory Ward Manager, who shared the story of a patient who had been supported by the Compassionate Companions Service. He was well-known by staff as a humorous and gregarious character and was especially grateful for the

relief the service gave his family, knowing they could be assured he always had someone around to keep him company when they weren't able to be there.

Compassionate Companions volunteer Colin Johnston said: "As soon as I heard about the service, I remember thinking, this is special and something I can do. We get so much positive feedback. Once a patient told me how much he appreciated having me there, even to do something as simple as pass him glasses of water. He said he didn't like to ring the bell and bother the staff for such small things – so British!"

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."

The launch coincides with Dying Matters Week to highlight the importance of holding end of life conversations – talking about death, dying and bereavement.

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

Dorothy House Hospice Care has an Outstanding rating by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) placing it in the top 6% of adult social care providers nationally. The Hospice provides palliative and end of life care to people with a life-limiting illness across 700 sq miles, serving a population of 550,000 people across Bath and North East Somerset (BaNES), Wiltshire and Somerset. The Hospice offers support, advice and care from early diagnosis onwards and patients, their families or carers can be referred by their GP or other Health and Social Care professional. Providing our services requires significant funds and for every £1 from the NHS, we have to raise £4. We do this through our fundraising work, our 27 shops and education programmes. To find out more visit www.dorothyhouse.org.uk.

The RUH's charity, [The Forever Friends Appeal](#) obtained the grant from the Sperring Trust to fund the new Compassionate Companion Service for three years.