

***Healing at the Mustard Tree,
Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, Devon
by Jenny Bourne***

The Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre is an information and support centre for people with cancer, their families and carers, which is based above Oncology in Derriford Hospital in Plymouth, Devon. The Drop In centre is open Monday to Friday from 9.00am-5.00pm and offers information, support and therapy.

This includes:

- Information and Specialist Services
- Counselling
- Complementary therapies: Healing, Massage, Indian Head Massage, Reflexology, Cranial-Sacral Therapy, Relaxation and Hypnotherapy
- Support Groups involving Health Care Professionals
- Support and Activities

I have worked at the Mustard Tree for ten years as a Healer, seven years on a voluntary basis and then for the last three years as a paid member of staff, with an NHS contract funded by Macmillan. I am now working three days a week, one of these days solely seeing patients on the wards.

Healing was first offered at the Mustard Tree by volunteer Healer Trish Asman in 1995 when it was then based in the old Freedom Fields Hospital. She would give healing to patients whilst another volunteer took people through a relaxation exercise. At the end of these sessions patients reported they were less stressed, more positive and relaxed.

In December 1995, Trish was approached and asked if she could give patients healing on a regular basis. In March 1996 she started working one afternoon a week. Since then the service has gone from strength to strength. On Trish's retirement in 2000, I became the Healing Team Co-ordinator and presently we are a team of six, five being volunteer Healers.

Healing is currently available in the Mustard Tree on Mondays and Fridays for individual appointments, with a Group Healing session taking place on Monday afternoons, on a drop-in basis. There are two therapy rooms available, each equipped with an electrically operated treatment couch. Two healers work each of the days either for some or the whole of the day and can see up to 11 people

between them (not including those attending the group healing session). Referral for a healing session is through Centre staff and volunteers, other healthcare professionals and self-referral. Healing/Reiki is also available at the Mustard Tree Outreach Services at Tavistock and Kingsbridge in Devon and Liskeard in Cornwall.

Healing is one of the therapies most subscribed to at the Mustard Tree and is offered to complement any other treatment that the patient may be receiving.

Healing is available to people affected by cancer at any stage of their illness and their partners/family/supporters/carers who find it very beneficial. When requested, visits are also made to patients on wards subject to the availability of a healer and time in which to give the healing.

Healing at the Mustard Tree is recognised for being part of an integrated approach and for being very valuable, helpful and supportive to many people. It promotes relaxation, release and revitalisation at many levels. People have found healing to be uplifting, giving time and space for themselves, enabling a sense of peace and strength to cope with both their illness and any treatments that they may be undergoing. It also helps with stress and anxiety, promotes a more positive outlook and some people find that it helps relieve side effects and alleviates pain.

Centre volunteers, some doctors and visiting healthcare professionals such as Macmillan nurses, Occupational Therapists, Radiographers and Nurses, have also tried healing sessions for themselves, with a very positive result. It has served to expand their understanding of what happens in a session and to have their own experience of what healing can feel like and its positive benefits.

On a personal note, in 2007 my Dad was diagnosed with colon cancer and this necessitated a colectomy and a long stay in hospital due a number of complications. This gave me an opportunity to spend a lot of time on the ward with him and in turn to gain even more of an insight into the daily life of a patient on a ward. I gave him healing throughout his hospital stay and he always found it to be a beneficial and positive experience, saying it was very relaxing, helping with pain relief and better sleep.

This experience prompted me to identify the need for ward patients to be able to access healing more often whilst they are on the wards. After discussion with my manager Sue Smith, we initiated a

pilot scheme. This involved referrals from the St Lukes Hospital Palliative Care Team as well as referrals through the Mustard Tree. This started with me seeing people on the wards for one morning a week and through need and word of mouth this quickly developed into the current full day service. It is essential to be able to offer healing to people on the wards who otherwise wouldn't be able to access it due to being hospitalised. It can make such a positive difference whether it is on an emotional, physical, mental or spiritual level or a combination of these.

As @12 has already outlined in more detail in a previous DHN article, healing on the wards is quite a different way of working than in other settings. There is a need to be very flexible and to be able to adapt to each patients situation. You need to work in harmony with the life of the ward and all that that entails and to be able to interact with and communicate effectively with patients, staff, patients' family and visitors. I see people on the Oncology and Haematology wards as well patients affected by cancer on any other ward in the hospital. It is very heartening to see how much healing can help a patient whatever point of their journey they are at. It is a very rewarding job which I and the healing team love and in which I learn and expand my understanding all the time.

In January 2009 building work begins to extend the Mustard Tree and will enable the centre to expand stretched services which are currently working to capacity. Last year the centre had 11,500 visits and with the expansion it is hoped to increase the number of visits to 13,000 a year. The expansion will have two levels, including a mezzanine level and will incorporate more room for counselling and therapy as well as a new training room amongst other developments and it is due to be completed in August 2009.

Jenny Bourne