

A 24/7 District Nursing Palliative Care Helpline in Fife: enabling timely, person-centred end of life care in the community

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Abbreviated abstract: The District Nursing Palliative Care Helpline aims to provide people in Fife in their last weeks of life with direct access to district nursing support without the need to go through NHS 24. In the three years since its launch, the helpline has received 10,439 calls, relating to care for 2,393 people. Calls are received 24/7, from all areas of Fife and equitably across all categories of socioeconomic deprivation. Further evaluation is needed to assess the impact on district nursing workload and future sustainability.

References:

1. Mason B et al. *BMJ Open* 2020 Nov 23;10(11):e041888

Background

- Over 90% of people use NHS unscheduled care in their last year of life, with over a third of all contacts occurring in the last month of life¹
- Timely management of unscheduled care episodes in the community has the potential to address people's palliative care needs effectively in their usual place of residence and prevent hospital admissions which may not be of value to them
- District Nurses are core providers of planned and urgent palliative care in the community
- In April 2019, Fife Community Nursing and Unscheduled Care Services established the District Nursing Palliative Care Helpline to provide people in Fife in their last weeks of life with direct access out of hours to district nursing support without the need to go through NHS 24
- At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the helpline was extended to run 24/7 and referral privileges were granted to a broader range of clinical teams

Aim and Methods

Aim: To evaluate the usage and impact of the District Nursing Palliative Care Helpline in its first three years

Approach:

- Retrospective evaluation of data from the helpline's launch in April 2019 up to March 2022
- Collaboration between clinicians in Fife Health and Social Care Partnership and Local Intelligence Support Team analysts from Public Health Scotland
- Linkage of data with regional health service datasets
- Data presented descriptively using proportions

Results and Conclusions

- Between April 2019 and March 2022, the helpline received 10,439 calls for 2,393 patients
- Most calls were triggered by concerns about uncontrolled symptoms
- The helpline is being accessed:
 - **24/7** – with 82% of calls received in the “out of hours” period
 - **Equitably** – with the proportion of callers from each category of socioeconomic deprivation almost identical to the proportion of the Fife population dying in each category
 - **Across the whole of Fife** – with calls received from every area in the region
- 84% of people who accessed the helpline died in their usual place of residence

This new innovative model of responsive community care enables more people in Fife to access urgent palliative care support in their last weeks of life – but, to ensure future sustainability, further evaluation is needed to assess the impact on district nursing workload. A survey is now underway to explore this.