

Elective Report

For my elective I chose to explore the area of Palliative Care attending a placement at St Joseph's Hospice in east London. This report outlines my learning objectives for this placement and how I met these.

1. Understand the need for palliative care services and know the different services provided by the palliative care team.

Over the past weeks I have seen many patients who have benefited from the services offered by the hospice and the hospital palliative care team. The patients I have met over this time have often had complex care needs and have greatly benefitted from the specialist expertise of the medical and nursing teams. These patients also benefit from the holistic approach provided by the tailored services offered by physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, complementary therapists, as well as social support, benefits advice and access to the chaplains.

In order to understand the different services offered by the hospice I spent time not only on the wards at the hospice with the medical team but also with the community palliative care team clinical nurse specialists seeing patients at home and coordinating care with district nurses and GPs. I spent time with the physiotherapists and the speech and language therapists on the respite and rehab ward and I also spent time in day hospice as well as with the social worker. Having such a varied schedule allowed me to gain a much greater understanding of the work of the palliative care team and gave me an overview of the hospice's work.

2. Compare palliative care services to other services offered by the NHS.

The palliative care team takes a much wider approach to patient care, offering a more holistic service, not only focussing on the patient but also supporting families at what can be a very hard time. The staff generally spends more time with each patient and there is a greater focus on communication and following patients agendas. The resources available through the hospice outstrip what is offered by an NHS hospital and the level of care is excellent.

3. Learn how to manage the terminal phase and its complications; nausea and vomiting and pain in the palliative care patients.

I have had tutorials covering these topics as well as discussing actual cases to explore the issues in the clinical setting and my assessment involved discussing how I would manage each of these symptoms. It was particularly useful to discuss the management of these symptoms in the acute hospital setting.

4. Consider whether I might like to work in palliative care in the future.

I feel that having taken part in a palliative care placement allows me to make a much more informed decision about my future. I have a much better idea now of what the day to day clinical work of palliative care entails as well as the differences between practicing in the community, the hospice and the hospital.