

In June 2002 I was persuaded by some Palliative Care Nurses with whom I worked in my role as the Social Worker for the cancer ward at Ipswich Hospital, to apply for the position of the newly created role of Family Support Worker for their team. I wasn't looking for a change of job, or even full time work, but the job description appealed. It felt like it had been written for me, making use of all my life and work experiences, and all the parts of those that I loved the most!

I was fortunate, I got the job! And then I had to set up the service. A new job, a mandate to work with the Palliative Care teams in the hospital and the community and to support families in whatever way was needed who were known to those teams.

14 years later I am retiring, but what a time I have had! Working in the NHS and in front line cancer services has been challenging. Setting up a service that didn't duplicate other services already out there and that looked at the needs of the family as a whole felt like going back into the Social Work that I was trained to do in the 1970's. Being a one man band also had its challenges, but also its benefits. Finding that actually it was often the children and young people who were the ones who needed support most fitted my love of working with that particular group. Working with many highly skilled practitioners from all sorts of different backgrounds, and then being able to develop good working relationships with schools. Setting up training for staff here at the hospital and also in schools. Being available for patients and families at the point of diagnosis and sometimes supporting them throughout their cancer journey, regardless of outcome. Supporting families in their grief, and helping schools to provide the best support too. Learning just what an impact cancer can have and the difficulties and stress of having to live with it, sometimes for many years, but without cure. The privilege of sharing some of the most difficult times of people's lives not because I wanted to, but because they wanted or needed something that they felt I could offer.

I discovered the APCSW soon after starting the job and joined up. Whilst not the most regular attender at regional meetings - being a lone worker with no admin back-up had real challenges when it came to being out of the office for the day, to say nothing of annual leave - I loved all that it has provided. There are 2 particular highlights. The first has to be meeting people who have become friends, and the second of course is the conferences. These became the place where I was encouraged, supported, challenged and enthused. Other than my first one in London at Queen Mary College in 2008, "Journey's through Palliative Care" which started my own journey to conferences, my favourite was probably York in 2016, "Putting the Social back into Palliative Care Social Work" which took me back to my roots. How I enjoyed some of the speakers reminding us of what Social Work is really all about, and how being at the front line here at the hospital fits with that. I came away feeling proud to be a Social Worker for the first time in years! A confirmation in all that I believed and held dear. We have unique skills and need to use them to champion those with whom we work. Patients and families do not necessarily need counselling, but someone who will give them the time of day, who will look at their welfare benefits and housing needs, meet with the children, and play games with them if that is what helps to build the relationship, talk to schools, walk alongside them in whatever way is right for that patient or family. We can do that and do it well, and should not feel we are lesser beings because of it!

I am not an academic and have never pretended to be - sometimes a challenge when you are in the presence of others who have that ability! But I have learnt to be confident in what I can do, which is often practical, getting along-side people and hands on, with a

dogged determination to do the right thing and get it sorted, in some way shape or form. Some would call it stubbornness. I am just programmed to not give up!

I will leave this job with immense sadness. I have been so privileged to have a job for 14 years that I have loved and that has been so fulfilling. Many things have changed and are changing. I have had an excellent job-share partner for 3 years. What could have been a disaster was a delight. Ipswich and Colchester have now merged and we have 2 new team members. So, they only have 18 month contracts but we are working hard to make these appointments permanent. I will leave with wonderful memories of inspiring patients and amazing young people, colleagues who are devoted to their jobs and are lots of fun to be around too.

Thank you to the Association for the part you have played over the years. My hope is that others will gain as much from you as I have!