Evaluation of Black & Minority Ethnic Support Groups at Paul’s Cancer Support Centre

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January 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation builds on previous work undertaken by Paul’s Cancer Support Centre with local Black & Minority Ethnic Communities. Working with current members, former members and other clients from BME communities, it has developed our understanding of how the current support groups are meeting the needs of our clients, what the key issues are for BME clients affected by cancer and what changes Paul’s Centre needs to make to its self-help programme to ensure it is fit for its growing BME community of the future.

Wandsworth borough is more ethnically diverse than the national population and varies widely in its level of deprivation – ranging from the very affluent to the very deprived. Local and national statistics show that late diagnosis and premature deaths from cancer are most likely to occur in the most disadvantaged parts of the community. Paul’s Cancer Support Centre has successfully been running the Asian and the African & Caribbean support group for over ten years to meet the local needs. The landscape of cancer has changed over this period and with survivorship high on the agenda, it is vital to evaluate the current services to ensure they continue to meet the evolving needs of the clients and the increasing diversity within local communities.

Two methods were used to gather information from clients of the Paul’s Cancer Support Centre between October and November 2015. A telephone interview was also conducted with the African & Caribbean group facilitator.
The findings of the questionnaire and the focus group confirm that when members first join one of the BME groups, it is often because of the cultural ‘hook’. Shared experiences such as the effects of treatment on hair and skin care, diet, dress and faith are culturally specific. Multiple languages and body language are important and specific to a culture and this promotes a sense of belonging creating an environment to develop a rapport. Together this has a direct impact on wellbeing. This requires coordination by a professional facilitator from the same cultural background to ensure smooth running of the groups.

Conclusion
This evaluation reinforces that Paul’s Cancer Support Centre provides a safe haven for the most vulnerable within the local community. Experienced staff understand varied cultural needs and offer support from diagnosis to living with cancer and beyond, taking into consideration individual differences. The importance of professional facilitators from a similar cultural background appears essential to the sustainability and further development of these groups. Information provided by health professionals such as doctors and nurses has resulted in better responses in uptake of services from BME clients, their families and community.

Recommendations
Based on the findings from the questionnaire and focus groups, the key recommendations are:

- Increase awareness of the cultural impact of cancer within the local community and amongst health professionals to encourage earlier diagnosis;
- Clarify the roles of the facilitators and expectations of support group members;
- Increase awareness among health professionals of the value of support for people affected by cancer, including social activities as a means of engaging with male clients and family members, who are not responsive to current services;
- Find ongoing funding to support professional facilitation of the groups and the development of awareness programmes, utilising the experiences of support group members.