

A unique partnership between Macmillan Cancer Support and West Dunbartonshire Council is empowering cancer patients with the knowledge they need to help them access the benefits advice and specialist support which so often eludes them.

Unique Partnership Provides **Crucial Help** for Cancer Patients

How much does cancer cost? It's a shocking question but one which thousands of Scots who have been diagnosed with the illness must address. At Macmillan, we're striving to ensure that the 26,000 people across Scotland diagnosed with cancer each year are not left to face the financial realities of their situation alone.

It's a unique challenge - but it is a challenge which one unique Local Authority partnership has already begun to address. Macmillan is currently working with West Dunbartonshire Council in a successful pilot scheme which is changing the way benefits advice is delivered for cancer patients and their families. Launched in 2005, the Macmillan West Dunbartonshire Benefits Project is the first of its kind in Scotland (and the UK) between a Local Authority and a major cancer charity and it is already being hailed as an example of 'best practice' by the charity and its supporters.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Macmillan's research *The Missing Millions* has revealed that financial concerns affect three quarters of cancer patients in Scotland. The actual cost of having cancer can run into tens of thousands of pounds and many cancer patients say that money worries are second only to pain as a cause of stress. Some even say financial concerns are greater.

For many, a cancer diagnosis can necessitate employment changes often resulting in reduced income. Even travelling to and from medical appointments and parking at hospital have been revealed as major causes of financial anxiety. In fact, Scottish cancer patients face the highest spend in the UK - an average outlay of - 636 over the course of their treatment.

Yet despite these statistics, Scotland has the lowest benefits claim rate in the UK with 64% of cancer patients with a terminal illness missing out on £15 million in unclaimed benefits. Why are 10,000 people missing out on vital financial support? Why these unclaimed millions? And what is being done to change the situation? With a growing number of Scots being diagnosed and living with cancer for longer, we need to develop services which provide equitable, effective social and emotional support regardless of a patient's postcode. But we can't do it alone.

MISMATCH

Macmillan's research has shown that too often there is a mismatch of need and delivery; half of those who die each year from cancer in the UK receive no financial support from the social security system. Benefits and financial advice isn't 'cancer specific' with a resulting lack of awareness over what an individual is entitled to claim. The confusion can be on both sides, with advisers usually only trained in very general benefits advice and cancer patients unsure of what they should be asking. Barriers to access are rife, with many patients berating the complexities of the benefits system and feeling overwhelmed by what can appear a bureaucratic maze.

The Macmillan West Dunbartonshire Benefits Project is a progressive partnership which provides crucial benefits and financial advice to people affected by cancer in the local community. Advisers are trained by Macmillan and equipped with specialist knowledge of the disease and its effects. This knowledge is bridging the gap, allowing benefits advisers to act as 'path finders' in the wider development of benefits advice across the country, linking local services with a network of advice providers.

Councillor Andy White, Leader, West Dunbartonshire Council said: "Partnership working and the sharing of expertise has a crucial and ongoing role to play in the development of local services. This pioneering Benefits Advice Project is a great example of innovative partnership working between local government and the charity sector. In fact, we've also teamed up with Macmillan in extending the Lomond and Clydebank Macmillan Carers' Project to Clydebank and District. Together, with Macmillan, we're delivering a range of services which will make a tangible difference to local cancer patients, their families and carers."

COMMITMENT

Elspeth Atkinson, Macmillan Cancer Support Director for Scotland and Northern Ireland praised the Council's commitment to delivering this vital service. "I am delighted with the progress which is being made as a result of this forward thinking partnership. This is exactly the sort of 'joined up thinking' and sharing of knowledge which Macmillan advocates. Financial concerns should not have to be the first thing on someone's mind when they are experiencing the worries associated with a diagnosis and this partnership will help ensure that more people will have access to benefits and



ELSPETH ATKINSON



BILL CLARK



CLLR ANDY WHITE

advice which will make a real difference to their quality of life. There is still a long way to go, however it is exactly this sort of partnership working which we hope will act as a force for change in the development of the UK benefits system and how it applies to Scots living with cancer."

Bill Clark, Director of Social Work Services, West Dunbartonshire Council is happy with the progress made by the project: "We are delighted to be involved in such a worthwhile initiative with Macmillan. It is really encouraging to know that we are making such a difference to people's lives"

Since May 2005 the West Dunbartonshire project has raised around £1 million in benefits, grants and allowances for cancer patients and families in the local authority area. In addition to state benefits many cancer patients have been assisted with travel costs, new clothing and heating costs through awards from the Macmillan Patient Grant scheme.