

## Northern England Strategic Clinical Networks Cancer Network Psychological Support Group

### Annual Report 2014

#### Introduction

This report relates to the operational period January to December 2014. In line with previous annual reports, it describes the key achievements and challenges for the group, during this period, and also the group's key ambitions for 2015.

#### Key Achievements

- The Group has met and significantly exceeded the commitments set out in the 3 year Education & Training Strategy. During 2014, further level 2 training was provided in every locality across NESCN, with the exception of County Durham & Darlington, where no level 3 or 4 practitioners have been appointed.
- In Cumbria, excellent progress was achieved in the Macmillan funded Fear of Recurrence project. A patient workbook was developed, which was reviewed by service users and received very positive feedback. The first 2 day training programme was delivered to a group of Level 2 practitioners, who had previously completed the Intermediate Cognitive Therapy skills training. Feedback confirmed that the practitioners were making regular use of their new skills.
- Service User involvement has successfully been increased and integrated within the Group. Geoff Gulston was appointed as a second service user representative to the Group and has attended a number of meetings in person, which the group has found most helpful. This complements the useful written and verbal feedback provided by our other service user representative, Kate Farnell. In addition, a modified service user questionnaire was re-piloted with a second group of patients with thyroid cancer, attending a regional clinic. The final version of the questionnaire was taken to the Lead Nurses Group and discussion is ongoing regarding the most appropriate way to utilise the questionnaire with other patient groups, in order to elicit service user feedback about perceptions of psychological support across NESCN.
- Greater clarity and consistency in the provision of supervision for level 2 practitioners was made possible through the development of a supervision protocol and a supervision contract. These documents clarify the purpose and format of supervision offered to level 2 practitioners, and serve as a guide to supervisors, supervisees and managers. The documents are available on the NESCN website.
- The Group has worked to develop links with members of the other clinical networks within NESCN. The Psychology Lead has attended meetings and training events

coordinated by NESCN and members of the Group attended the NESCN Parity of Esteem event in October, which was a useful forum to meet many other stakeholders from across the different networks.

- Members of the Group have contributed to a number of training events across the region, including “Acceptance & Commitment Therapy: An Introductory Workshop” delivered to the Northern Region Palliative Care Physicians Group in September and a breakout group on Assessing psychological wellbeing in physical health patients, for the NESCN Parity of Esteem event.

## Key Challenges

- The group welcomes the development of NESCN and the joining of different specialisms and areas of health care that have the potential to learn from each other and to share experience and expertise. However, this well established Group has found it a challenge to find clear mechanisms for continuing to develop and support excellent psychological care, within the new structure of NESCN which is itself evolving in a climate of uncertainty and continual change.
- Continuing uncertainty about the future of Peer Review, and in particular the Psychological Support Measures, has made it difficult to envisage a clear route to continue to develop and enhance delivery of excellent professional psychological support.
- Lack of funding and planning for the ongoing delivery of Advanced Communication Skills Training has made delivery of Level 2 Training more of a challenge, as many practitioners requiring training in Level 2 psychological skills have not had the opportunity to achieve this important pre-requisite to Level 2 training.
- Many if not all of the Level 2 practitioners that we offer supervision to, following Level 2 training, find it impossible to attend supervision regularly due to very high demands on their time and pressure of clinical work, despite this being a Peer Review requirement. Inevitably irregular attendance detracts from the benefits achieved through supervision.

## Key Ambitions

- A forum to collaborate, learn from and support each other, regarding the ongoing development of psychological services and support for adults with cancer and specialist palliative care needs, is greatly valued by the Group. We would like to continue to evolve alongside the wider evolution of NESCN. We hope to play a useful role in the development and delivery of the new National Cancer Strategy, and to promote excellent, and appropriate psychological care that is accessible to all patients and their carers, as needed.

- Continue to develop and deliver bespoke training for Level 2 practitioners, in order to further enhance their skills in meeting service user needs for psychological support.
- Revise the Service Needs Assessment and to share this as appropriate with locality groups and commissioners, in order to continue to promote the importance of excellent psychological services for all adults with cancer.

## Summary

The Cancer Network Psychological Support Group has exceeded commitments made in the Education & Training Strategy to deliver training and supervision to Level 2 practitioners across the network. In addition, further bespoke training has been delivered in a number of localities, to further enhance the skills of non- mental health practitioners, providing psychological support to patients and carers.

Since the NICE guidance on Improving Supportive and Palliative Care for adults was published in 2004, there have been very significant developments across the Cancer Network in the provision and delivery of psychological support to patients with cancer. These developments have been made possible because national policies and drivers have given clear standards and expectations of psychological support and the Cancer Network has provided sustained support to deliver these. The fear is that without an ongoing explicit national commitment to continue to promote and further develop psychological support, eg through Advanced Communication Skills Training and Peer Review Measures for Psychological Support, the impetus for Trusts to work with us to deliver good psychological care will be lost, and progress will not be maintained. Clear direction and support at both a national and regional level is vital in order for progress to be maintained and developed and for the momentum achieved by this Group to continue.

**Kate Kendell**  
**Cancer Network Psychology Lead**  
**in collaboration with the Cancer Network Psychological Support Group**