BCH e-learning course extends paediatric oncology training to nurses everywhere

Paediatric oncology nursing is not well covered in student nurse education and there is a clear need for post registration training. However, this specialised training and education is difficult to access for several reasons. The numbers of staff needing training are low in any region, for example, and it is often not financially viable for local universities to provide such training.

Another factor is that oncology nursing relies heavily on extended skills (such as chemotherapy administration) which are not easily taught through university-based courses or available through trust professional development departments.

Birmingham Children’s Hospital Foundation Trust (BCHFT) is the second largest paediatric oncology centre in the UK, offering the full range of oncology/haematology services, and has been providing practical skills training with underpinning knowledge for its own nursing staff and for those in paediatric oncology shared care units (POSCUs) since the early 1990s.

Traditionally, this Paediatric Practical Oncology Course was founded on four paper-based workbooks and competency-based clinical skills training.

Thanks to a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning project, Birmingham City University has had an opportunity to revise the course delivery method and offer it as an e-learning course.

Immediate benefits
This will give nurses at BCH more flexible learning options, such as the ability to choose the time and place they study and have electronic links to learning materials. Nurses in our POSCUs will be able to start the course locally and have electronic access to the facilitator and resources at BCHFT, meaning that they will need less time out of their local hospital to attend the course at BCHFT.

An e-learning version of the course also enhances our ability to market the course outside the West Midlands, giving other regions access to courses and promoting BCHFT as a centre of excellence.

In addition, we have a linked initiative to provide an information learning DVD for community nurses delivering cytarabine in the community, and there is the potential in future to further evolve the course to provide basic skills and education for junior doctors rotating through the specialty.

Key successes to date
Since our course was approved we have reviewed the workbooks and established what other media resources we needed to create to support learning away from the ward. We have now embedded some mini video clips of key oncology clinical procedures.

To make sure the course meets local needs and potentially more national needs, we have approached the RCN Paediatric Oncology Nurse Educators who have agreed to review the content of the course and, if happy with it, give us a seal of approval for it.

We started the first cohort of students using the e-learning version of the course from BCHFT and our local POSCUs in the summer of this year.

Can you run a pilot?
We received further support from the Department of Health Cancer Action Team to develop a pilot for using the course outside the West Midlands. As a result we are now looking for one other principal treatment centre (PTC) to participate in the second part of the pilot, enrolling students from spring 2009.

This second pilot centre is welcome to include...
Improving outcomes guidance for children and young people with cancer

- The Children’s Peer Review measures will be out very soon for consultation.
- Guidance for commissioners around referral pathways for young people has been issued.
- By the end of September the strategic health authorities needed to provide clarification about referral pathways for teenagers and young adults to designated centres.

RUTH WHITLOCK and RACHEL COYNE have put their prize to good use! Addenbrooke’s nurses win Martha Taylor Memorial Award

This award of up to £2,000 was offered earlier in the year to support children’s nurses working in the field of paediatric oncology in developing a project or research to address the wellbeing of children with cancer and their families.

The successful recipients of the award were the oncology nurses in the Paediatric Day Unit at Addenbrooke’s NHS Trust, enabling us to implement a nurse-led chemotherapy service. The background work to this initiative had been done, but owing to staffing pressures the start of the project had been delayed.

This award enabled staffing backfill to kickstart the project, giving us time for appropriate training and implementation, thereby ensuring the success of the project.

This will improve the experience of the children in our service, as wait times are shortened and the total time spent in the unit is reduced and streamlined.

We are most grateful for this award which gives us the opportunity to implement this initiative.

Ruth Whitlock is Practice Development Nurse and Rachel Coyne Lead Nurse in paediatric oncology at Addenbrooke’s.

New DVD eases the return to school for young people with cancer

A DVD entitled Coping with cancer, continuing with education was produced in East Anglia last year by Alison Dowsett, Paediatric Oncology Outreach Nurse Specialist. Her aim was to help prepare schools and colleges for the return of a young person diagnosed with cancer.

Following the success of this DVD locally, Alison is currently working in collaboration with CLIC Sargent to produce a national package, including two final versions – one for young people diagnosed with cancer and the other aimed at teachers and school friends.

Alison is Paediatric Oncology Outreach Nurse Specialist at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge. Contact her at: alison.dowsett@addenbrookes.nhs.uk if you’d like a progress report.