

# Macmillan nurses fact sheet

# We give expert care and support

Macmillan nurses provide expert information, advice and support to improve the lives of people with cancer. They may give advice and information on treatments, practical, psychological and emotional support, as well as assisting someone living with cancer control their symptoms and pain.

Macmillan nurses also offer support and information to families, friends, carers and local communities. There are currently around 3,000 Macmillan nurses, most of who work within the NHS so their services are free. Many people are referred to a Macmillan nurse by their GP, district nurse, consultant or ward sister.

Macmillan nurses support people when they are first diagnosed and throughout their illness. They are there to help people make informed decisions about their treatment, and guide them through the maze of different services. They also help people to cope with problems such as the side effects of treatment and other symptoms.

## Part of a team

Macmillan nurses work with other health and social care professionals, sharing their knowledge and skills, and helping to co-ordinate care between hospital and home. (Please see the *Macmillan health and social care professionals* fact sheet for more information on other Macmillan professionals).

## Qualified and experienced

All Macmillan nurses are registered nurses with at least five years' experience, including two or more years in cancer or palliative care (see [www.macmillan.org.uk/glossary](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/glossary) for a definition of palliative care). They also complete specialist courses in subjects such as managing pain and other symptoms, and psychological support.

## Employed by the NHS

Macmillan nurses are usually employed by the NHS. Their posts are developed in partnership with the NHS or other organisations and funded by Macmillan for a period of time, usually the first three years. After this time, the NHS or other partner organisation, takes on responsibility for managing and paying them, but we continue to educate and support the nurses. (Please see the *Working with other health and social care organisations* fact sheet for more information on our relationship with our Macmillan professionals).

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, there are now around 3,000 Macmillan nurses throughout the UK. They include community care and hospital support nurses, and others who specialise in particular cancers, treatments or other specialist areas of cancer care.

**Macmillan community-based nurses** play a vital role in helping people with cancer to stay at home with their families. They work with community health professionals to make sure people with cancer get the best possible physical and emotional care at every stage of their illness.

**Macmillan hospital-based nurses** provide support to people with cancer from the time they are diagnosed through their treatment. They work with district nurses, GPs and other community healthcare professionals to make sure that people with cancer get the care they need during treatment and when they return home from hospital.

Some Macmillan nurses specialise in particular types of cancer, for example **Macmillan breast care nurses** care for women who have breast cancer. They support women from the screening and diagnosis stage, helping them to make informed decisions. They give practical and emotional support, and help women following breast surgery or treatment.

**Other nurse specialisms** include **lung cancer, bowel cancer, testicular cancer, head and neck cancer, gynaecological cancers** and **lymphoedema**.

Some Macmillan nurses specialise in particular treatments. For example, **Macmillan chemotherapy nurses** give chemotherapy treatments to patients, and help them to cope with the side effects that may occur.

**Macmillan paediatric nurses** help children with cancer and their families. They provide support for children and their parents at home and in hospital, and help to keep children at home with their families as much as possible.

**Macmillan lead cancer nurses** are senior nurse managers, helping shape the future of cancer and palliative care services in their area. With other senior managers they develop and implement plans for cancer and palliative care services throughout their NHS Trust or network, and between hospital and home, to ensure better co-ordinated services.

## Questions about Macmillan nurses

**What exactly do Macmillan nurses do?** Macmillan nurses are specially trained to help people with cancer, their carers and families. They provide:

- information about cancer treatments and side effects
- an opportunity to discuss problems, feelings and future plans
- advice on pain and symptom control
- advice to other members of the team, for example district nurses and Marie Curie nurses.

Our Macmillan nurses use these skills and offer more specialist help and advice to patients with cancer. Their work is in addition to that of general nursing staff who provide day-to-day care for a wide range of patients in hospitals and the community.

**How can I get referred to a Macmillan nurse?** Macmillan nurses can provide help and support at any time after someone has been diagnosed with cancer. Usually the consultant, GP, ward sister, district nurse or clinic nurse will refer someone with cancer to a Macmillan nurse, using locally agreed guidelines. There is no charge for a Macmillan nurse.

**I told my doctor I wanted to be referred to a Macmillan nurse, but I have not yet seen one. Why?** It may be one of several reasons. Not all areas of the country have Macmillan nurses; in some situations the kinds of help needed may well be better delivered by another non-Macmillan nurse, and sometimes doctors may not be clear about how or when to make a referral. Our Macmillan CancerLine (freephone 0808 808 2020) can give further individual advice.

**Are Macmillan nurses available during the night/at weekends?** Macmillan nurses are not an 'emergency service' – they usually work normal office hours, although some work different hours. If the Macmillan nurse is not available, there should be a recorded phone message giving phone numbers of other services to contact out-of-hours. Our website, [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk), is available 24 hours a day and has information on other organisations, and the Macmillan CancerLine (freephone 0808 808 2020) is open from Monday to Friday, 9am-10pm.

**Are Macmillan nurses available in the private sector?** Macmillan is increasing the links we have with hospitals and services in the private sector to promote the highest standards of care, although Macmillan nurses are not normally available in private hospitals. We are working to improve links between community nurses and private hospitals to ensure that people who receive part of their treatment within the private sector, such as surgery, are referred to community NHS support services and do not 'fall through the net' when they are discharged.

**Are Macmillan nurses available for people with a non-cancer diagnosis?** We focus mainly on people affected by cancer. But we are increasingly sharing experience and working with colleagues caring for people with other conditions and do provide some support for non-cancer patients.

**What is the difference between Macmillan nurses and Marie Curie nurses?** Macmillan nurses and Marie Curie nurses work to support people with cancer in very different ways.

Macmillan nurses are specially trained to help patients, their carers and families throughout their experience of cancer by providing:

- information about cancer treatments and side effects
- an opportunity to discuss problems, feelings and future plans
- advice on pain and symptom control
- advice to other members of the caring team, for example district nurses and Marie Curie nurses.

Marie Curie nurses provide practical, hands-on nursing care during the terminal stages of cancer in patients' homes and will often be available for a morning, afternoon or all night so that the family carers can rest.

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