



Carol Fitzpatrick

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## **As Christmas approaches, staff nurse Carol Fitzpatrick reflects on her role in Living Well**

We are a charity supporting those living with life-limiting illnesses and their families, is all about helping patients get the best out of each day. Key to this approach is the work of the Living Well programme. As Christmas approaches, staff nurse Carol Fitzpatrick reflects on her role within the programme's team and the way in which Living Well has had to adapt to the current situation, while still improving patients' lives, day in, day out.

“I’ve been a staff nurse at **ellenor** for the past ten years, and I work as part of the charity’s three-person-strong Living Well team. Our patients are coping with illnesses from cancer to Parkinson’s and cover an age-range from mid-twenties to 102 – so our days are as varied as the people we’re helping. The 12-week Living Well programme is all about empowering patients to set their own goals and achieve them – goals to make their quality of life, whatever its length, that much better. We do this by matching them with our expert team of therapists – physios, occupational therapists, reflexologists, art and music therapists – and we can and do refer them to outside agencies if appropriate. Often, a goal centres on increasing a patient’s sense of independence in one form or another, whether that’s by improving their mobility through physiotherapy or their breathing through relaxation classes and exercises. We monitor their improvement throughout the programme and nearly always see a marked change for the better – even the social interaction with other patients makes a real positive difference.

Coming to the hospice as a Living Well patient undoubtedly changes lives, because it changes attitudes. The atmosphere here dispels any preconceived ideas people can have about hospices: this is a place that’s full of life, always a hub of activity and – in some areas – a noisy one! At the end of the 12-week programme, many patients say they want to continue coming to us, so they move on to our Wellbeing programme, normally on offer throughout the week, with complementary group therapies including mindfulness, relaxation and seated exercise on offer.

Obviously, the pandemic means we’re having to interact with people very differently now. Though our patients currently can’t come into the hospice, the Living Well team continues to monitor and help them manage their symptoms, and addresses their physiological and emotional needs, which are just as important. Telephoning as often as three times a week is particularly vital for those of our patients who can’t access the services, we’re now offering online, such as social meetings via Zoom, and our group art, music and seated exercise classes. We never discuss patients’ individual symptoms during our group Zoom activities, but we always say that if any patient wants us to call them after an online meeting for a one-to-one, we will do. A great advantage is that, if necessary, our physio, Andy, and Occupational Therapist, Claire, can visit patients at home if, say, someone is struggling with breathing or needs equipment. We are always there for them.

We all know that that Christmas 2020 is going to be very, very different – and the knowledge for some that they are on limited time will make things

even harder. We are going to do all we can to take the spirit of the Christmas parties we usually enjoy at this time of year online. We're hoping to have school choirs singing for us via the magic of technology and will encourage everyone to join in with the festivities by wearing silly hats as they join in our Zoom Christmas party. We want our patients to know that, even on Christmas day, we are still working, still caring – and just a phone call away. It's a time for family members who are carers, too, to be especially aware that we are here for them – and for the wider community to recognise all the extraordinary, dedicated work that carers, both paid and unpaid, do for society as a whole. We are so reliant on our local community for support, which enables us to keep going not just at Christmas but 365 days of the year. If that support can continue into 2021 and beyond, we would be eternally grateful.

As Christmas approaches, I'd like to thank every single person involved in patient care here

We are truly a team, and for as long as we're able to keep on working together, we know that we're able to give the very best support to our patients, helping them to make the most of every moment of their lives.”

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We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

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