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hospice care in your home or ours

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Counselling| What we offer

ellenor provides hospice care and support to patients and families facing life-limiting illnesses in the Kent and Bexley communities. As well as offering palliative and end of life care to patients, we also provide a range of wellbeing services and complementary therapies, which include spiritual and emotional care, as well as respite and bereavement support.

Part of this service comes from **ellenor's** Counselling team, which works to support families experiencing loss, grief, and bereavement. Made up of a range of qualified and trainee counsellors – the majority of whom are volunteers – the team provides free counselling to families of our patients, as well as facilitating safe, supportive environments where grief can be released and shared.

As a charity that provides care towards the twilight of its patients' lives, **ellenor** works to maximise the quality of the time an individual has left. Of course, that means not only dealing with death on a day-to-day basis, but also supporting those most affected by it – namely, the families and loved ones of people who have passed away under **ellenor**'s care. Bereavement counselling is also available for those who live in the local area and have lost a loved one – even if they have never before accessed our services.

The role of our Counselling Team (which is part of the organisation's wider Wellbeing Team) is to support not only the patients, but the ones they leave behind.

Counselling at **ellenor**: a safe, supportive space

Counselling is a type of therapy that allows individuals to explore areas of their life in which there may be distress, dissatisfaction, confusion, or uncertainty. Here at **ellenor**, it involves speaking to a member of its team of 26 counsellors at the charity's Gravesend or Dartford bases – or via Zoom, or over the telephone – over a course of 12 50-minute, one-to-one sessions.

Our counselling service cultivates a non-judgemental, supportive, and completely confidential environment in which individuals can open up a conversation around any issues they want to address – even the relatively mundane stresses and struggles of everyday life.

People aren't pressured or led anywhere they don't want to go, or pushed to speak about any issue in particular. Nor do our counsellors attempt to prescribe a specific course, or 'diagnose' people that utilise the service.

It's simply a safe space, in which people can develop new strengths and skills, and discover dynamic ways of dealing with difficulties.

Wellbeing and Bereavement: the two types of counselling

At ellenor, counselling falls under two broad 'headings' – wellbeing, and bereavement.

Wellbeing counselling provides an individual with the opportunity to talk about anything that's on their mind, or that they might be feeling in response to daily emotional, occupational, or social pressures.

Bereavement counselling, on the other hand, is oriented more towards the grief, suffering, and feelings of loss that have arisen as a direct result of the loss of a loved one.

Under the current setup, families who have loved ones currently utilising **ellenor's** service are able to access up to 12 sessions of wellbeing counselling, and then –if a bereavement later occurs –an additional 12 sessions of bereavement counselling.

However, Catherine “Cat” Aird – a recent appointment into the role of Counselling Manager here –has already introduced a system by which a course of counselling can be extended, on a case-by-case basis. This is to ensure that the service is able to meet the needs of families under our care in their entirety, and to avoid putting the onus on them to choose which state of grief they're receiving counselling for.

“I'm not one to put people in a box,” Cat says. “I will always come to try and understand the person sitting opposite me. *Them* – not a theory from a textbook.”

Understanding the difference between grief and bereavement

Part of the reason that **ellenor's** counselling service is categorised in two different schools can be traced back to a key – but oft-misunderstood –distinction: grief and bereavement.

Whereas bereavement – the experience of losing someone important; whether that be a partner, family member, friend, or pet – is tied to a specific event, grief is far more wide-ranging. Grief doesn't have a time limit; rather, it can be experienced not only after a bereavement, but before it, too. Grief isn't always tied solely to the loss of the person, either, but can also coalesce around the loss of future prospects, quality of life, or a part of an individual's or family's identity.

This, Cat asserts, is why the role of counselling is so important within a

hospice setting – providing people a platform to open up conversations around death, and giving them an outlet for their grief.

“I know the nature of grief– how it can completely shatter your identity. To be able to support people through that time, and make sure they know that they’ve got that support for as long as they need it –that’s why we’re here. And that’s why it’s so important.”

Grieving collectively to break down taboos

Part of **ellenor**’s Counselling team’s long-term plan and priorities involves breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health.

That’s because the idea of seeking counselling is wrapped up in public taboos around ‘mental illness’. Additionally, grief –so often seen as an inherently individual process that a person must deal with in private –adds even more layers of stigma, especially when the expectations of society are piled on top.

[When’s the appropriate time to return to work after a loss, for instance? When ‘should’ a bereaved person start feeling better? What’s the ‘right’ or the ‘wrong’ way to grieve?](#)

Cat explains: “The expectation in society following a loss is often that I *should* rush back to work and crack on with it –that it *must* get better in time. You’ve got all these societal expectations and pressures–these ‘shoulds’ and ‘musts’ –when, actually, you’re grieving.

“There’s no right or wrong way to grieve. Whatever you feel, you feel for a reason, and there’s no ‘should’ or ‘must’ about that.”

A part of **ellenor**’s wellbeing services that’s closely linked to the work of the Counselling team is Bereavement Support, which helps the bereaved families of **ellenor**’s patients come to terms with the loss.

One such initiative – which aims to empower grieving families by connecting them with people in a similar situation – is **ellenor**’s ‘Bereavement Cuppa’. **It allows bereaved individuals to meet up for a coffee, and to share their feelings, stories, and experiences with one another in an informal environment.**

Other related offerings include **ellenor's** 'Walk and Talk Bereavement Group' –which gets people together for a gentle, two-hour stroll through the Gravesend countryside–and the GEMS (Grief Every Memory is Special) group for bereaved children.

In tandem with counselling, these groups –though they won't necessarily be for everyone –can bulldoze the inhibitive taboos around grief, and help our bereaved families forge a path forward.

Counselling at ellenor: What does the future hold?

The Counselling team's immediate goal for the months and years ahead involves ensuring greater access to ellenor's counselling service, for the families of patients under our care, and for bereaved individuals in the local area – even if they were not previously accessing ellenor's services

The team also wants to make working with our Fundraising and Communications and Marketing teams, respectively, a central focus. The aim? Helping people understand that accessing counselling isn't a *symptom* of mental illness or crisis, but actually a way of *avoiding* that crisis point –of its use as a tool for mental health and happiness.

Our Counselling team has already improved the ease with which those currently accessing the service can extend their course of sessions. However, the challenges going forward will lie in balancing this against the length of the waiting lists. **In other words, it's not only about increasing the *amount* of sessions a grieving person can access, but how many families and individuals at large can benefit from the service.**

Resources-permitting, the team would like to enlist even more counsellors and supervisors (trained professionals who are responsible for overseeing the counsellors and maintaining ethical and confidentiality standards)to **ellenor's** cause.

After all, more dedicated counselling professionals would mean shorter wait times. That, in turn, would mean more struggling families with the ability to access that support at the time they need it most.

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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