

Cancer patients can be treated at home

It comes as no surprise to anyone who works in the health system that the staff who work in cancer services are not coping with the increasing number of patients or that the facilities are overcrowded.

Despite the building of new hospitals, the number of additional beds and day-unit chairs planned in these facilities barely covers the replacement of the existing resources, let alone the requirements for the future increase in demand. The incidence of cancer in the WA population is set to double in the next 20 years. Along with this, better cancer treatments result in patients living longer and hence they receive more treatment over a longer period of time. This means the amount of resources needed to cater for the increased numbers far outstrips what is currently being planned for.

As has been seen by the current crisis at PMH, the impact of this on families is devastating.

The fact remains that while the Government needs to address the staff shortages through a variety of mechanisms there is no continuing capacity to keep building hospitals at a rate that will keep up with the demand.

The answer to not having enough hospital space, be that beds and day-unit chairs for patients, or facilities for relatives to be with their loved one while they undergo their cancer treatment, is to treat the patients at home whenever possible.

Unlike a hospital, domiciliary health services are easily configured and reconfigured to match population demand. Chemotherapy and other supportive cancer treatments can be, in many cases, given safely at home through specialised

domiciliary cancer services. In addition, treating cancer patients at home has many benefits to the overall wellbeing of the patient and their family.

In one study, children with cancer treated at home showed improvements in independence, wellbeing, appetite, mood and school work and parents reported that they felt more in control, were better able to cope and learnt more about their children's illness and treatment.

Perhaps the Government may like to look at the option of improving home-based cancer services as one option to address the lack of facilities. It may well be a lot cheaper than building a new ward or a new hospital and services could be increased much faster.

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