DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS AND DESCRIBING PATHWAYS TO IMPROVE PALLIATIVE CARE



An Australian Government Initiative

Hunter New England (HNE) Health Pathways is an innovative, sustainable, whole of system solution to improve assessment and management in primary care and appropriate referral of patients to private and public specialist services. This has been realised via a collaborative effort between the Hunter New England Central Coast Primary Health Network (HNECCPHN) and the HNE Local Health District (HNELHD).

HNECC PHN was the first PHN in Australia to introduce HealthPathways and it has now been adopted by a majority of PHNs across the country.

IDENTIFICATION OF NEED

In 2012 the Palliative Care team approached HNE HealthPathways to develop a suite of pathways to support primary care clinicians to respectfully manage patients at home and make sensitive decisions around appropriate referrals. During the first meetings, we discussed what was working well in both the primary and acute settings and also brainstormed potential improvements in the palliative care space.

EDUCATION AND REINFORCEMENT

Further education and reinforcement was provided during a second HPMI Palliative care day in 2018 where the clinical and referral information in the HealthPathways was again used as the basis for the majority of the sessions. This included a strong focus on advance care planning and commencing the conversation around end of life. This education also coincided with a change in department head allowing primary care and acute care relationships to be developed further.

PATHWAY UPDATE TO INCLUDE WHOLE OF DISTRICT

Initially HealthPathways only covered the area immediately surrounding Newcastle. Since then we have grown and our pathways now cover the whole of the HNELHD area. In 2017 we reviewed all the clinical pathways and significantly expanded the referral pages to include information and criteria for all clinical services available in the HNELHD as well as services that provide advice and support for rural and remote clinicians and patients.

CONSULTATION

The pathway development team was and continues to be responsible for the drafting the initial pathways and maintaining the clinical accuracy and articulation of local processes. The team consists of palliative care specialists and allied health clinicians, GPs as well as a facilitator and clinical editor from the HNE HealthPathways team.

COLLABORATION

GPs
Practice Nurses
Palliative Care Specialists
Pharmacists
Social Workers
Clinical Nurse Consultants
Paediatric Palliative Care Specialists
Occupational Therapists
Chaplain
Aboriginal Health Practitioner

HealthPathways team

PATHWAY DEVELOPMENT

The first suite of web-based palliative care pathways were published on the HealthPathways portal in 2013 for clinicians to use. These contained locally agreed upon, evidence based assessment, management and referral information for the Newcastle area. During the development process there was extensive collaboration with the palliative care team as well feedback received and incorporated from wider consultation with a much larger group of primary, secondary and tertiary clinicians.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EDUCATION

The HealthPathways team raised awareness and promoted use of these pathways through numerous GP educational events and GP practice visits. The clinical pathways formed the agenda for the Hunter Post Graduate Institute (HPMI) GP Palliative Care day in 2014 during which time the pathway contributors presented the pathway and related information. This was also an opportunity to gain feedback and make relevant changes regarding the pathway content and any additional service issues and referral end points.

ANALYSIS

We started with a small number of pathways that focused on assessment, management and referral for symptom control in palliative care patients. After feedback from our users over 6 years, this has expanded to 21 clinical pathways and a number of referral pages that include advance care planning, bereavement and care in the last days of life. The HealthPathways site receives 60 000 pageviews per month of which a significant proportion are in the palliative care domain.

REVIEW CYCLE AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

All HealthPathways undergo regular independent formal review by both the working group as well as a wider group of local clinicians, including pharmacists and GPs, to ensure clinical accuracy and currency of referral options. The palliative care pathways have now undergone 2 formal review cycles as well as improvements based on unsolicited feedback.





An Australian Government Initiative

