



Just a phone call away

No two calls to the Macmillan CancerLine are the same, according to manager, Sandra Benson. The skill of her team is to listen carefully to ensure that every caller gets the maximum support available.

The Macmillan CancerLine provides free information and emotional support for people living with cancer. It is staffed by nine paid staff and 22 volunteers, who work from the London office, Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm.

Some of the staff are motivated by having had cancer, others by losing a friend or relative to the disease. All of them have been thoroughly trained on issues such as bereavement, diet and children with cancer. They will listen to callers' concerns and put them in touch with the right support, whether it's a Macmillan service, another organisation or a local self help and support group. The helpline started in June 2002 and last year received 30,300 calls – a 40 per cent rise on the previous year.

Two-thirds of the calls are related to services provided by Macmillan – for example, finding a Macmillan nurse or applying for a grant. The other third of calls are about subjects

such as insurance, respite care or medical information, and the team are able to signpost callers to relevant sources of information.

Support for all the family

Sandra Benson, explains how the Macmillan CancerLine can help: 'The aunt of a 17-year-old girl rang me in a terrible state. Her niece had terminal cancer and wouldn't come out of her room. The girl's mother was feeling suicidal and the father had left home many years ago.

'With a call like this, it is a question of pulling out all the different strands of who needs support. I called a local youth-based cancer group, Kidz Fight Cancer, and they agreed to visit the niece at her home. Apparently, the girl had always wanted to go to Disneyland, so I gave the aunt the number of the Starlight Children's Foundation, which fulfils the wishes of children with terminal illnesses.



'I was also able to give her information about two sisters who had recently set up a scheme to give free makeovers to cancer patients.

'The mother was in financial difficulty, so I told the aunt about the Macmillan Benefits Helpline. I also

Want more information?



If you have any questions, call Macmillan CancerLine on 0808 808 2020, email cancerline@macmillan.org.uk or textphone 0808 808 0121. Open Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm



gave her information about agencies that provided help with cleaning.

'Soon after this call, an older gentleman rang who was about to have an operation for prostate cancer. His wife was schizophrenic and had been taken into a secure hospital. The man was worried about telling his children, aged nine and five. He also wanted to find a live-in carer to look after them. To follow up the call, I sent him Macmillan's *Talking to Children* booklet, another one on *Men and Cancer* and another one for carers. I also found two local nanny agencies that offered live-in support.'

One of the helpline staff adds: 'Working on the Macmillan CancerLine can be an emotional roller coaster, but it is also very rewarding when you know someone is in a better place at the end of the call, with the information to help them make decisions to improve their situation.'

Available in 150 languages

The Macmillan Cancerline has a textphone service for people with hearing impairments and a link to Language Line, which has access to 3,000 interpreters speaking 150 languages. In March the helpline was accredited to the Telephone Helplines Association's Quality Standard. Out of

around 1,200 helplines across the UK, only 17 others have achieved this accreditation.

Future plans for the CancerLine include recruiting more volunteers, developing more services for ethnic minority communities and piloting a service for young people affected by cancer. We will keep you up to date in our news pages.

If you are affected by cancer and would like a free benefits guide, call the campaign line on 0800 500 800 or visit www.macmillan.org.uk/abetterdeal

Helping relieve the financial strain

The Macmillan Benefits Helpline is a telephone advice service for people with cancer, their families and carers who need help to access benefits and other kinds of financial support.

The helpline started in July 2003 to help people with cancer access the millions of pounds of benefits that currently go unclaimed because of the lack of awareness. Macmillan's recent research found that this totals £126.5 million across the UK! The helpline, based in Bingley, West Yorkshire, has eight advisers who are experienced in all aspects of making benefits claims.

As well as statutory benefits such as disability living allowance, housing benefit and tax credits, they also advise on other benefits such as grants and disabled parking badges.

By the end of 2004, more than 5,000 people had called the line. A recent evaluation of the service showed that people with cancer were, on average, at least £2,000 a year better off after contacting the helpline.

Call: 0808 801 0304

A Better Deal

One of Macmillan's current campaigns is the Better Deal campaign – to get a better financial deal for people with cancer – which has been running since November 2004.



The eight benefits helpline advisers at their office in Bingley, West Yorkshire