

Dear Colleagues,

**An update on our services for your patients and their carers'.**

COVID-19 has impacted on our hospice services. We are busy and stretched, but also desperate to step up support for people struggling with complex palliative and end of life challenges and for GP, DN and other front line colleagues. We felt an update about our services would be useful. We want to be sure that referrers have the confidence to continue to refer people with advanced, life limiting conditions who need palliative support, and enough knowledge about our services to be able to share what we do with patients and families.

Wherever we are delivering care we do so with highest COVID-19 safe practice standards, using appropriate PPE, and following Government guidelines. We are happy to support, whatever the COVID-19 status.

**Referrals Hub** – Referrals are all received electronically now (not by fax), via a generic nhs.net address: [NELCSU.saintfrancishospicereferrals@nhs.net](mailto:NELCSU.saintfrancishospicereferrals@nhs.net). Our referral form is on our website (either go straight to [www.sfh.org.uk/refer-a-patient](http://www.sfh.org.uk/refer-a-patient) or to [www.sfh.org.uk](http://www.sfh.org.uk) and then through the **For Patients and Professionals** tab to **Making a Referral** tab to **Refer a patient**. The form is at the bottom of that page. We pick up referrals 7 days a week. Between 9-4 the referral will be read within 2 hours. We try our best to make contact with anyone who is at home within 24 hours, but please indicate URGENT on the referral if the patient is in crisis/rapidly deteriorating, and supply key clinical information on the form/attach recent clinical information to help us prioritise. Recent blood results, drugs and allergies really help.

**Inpatient Unit** – We have been able to keep 16 beds safe and fully operational, and can stretch more if someone is in need but able to mobilise safely/independently. The IPU is being heavily used so that there can be a wait; always hard – but we review the waiting list every day in an effort to identify the person in most need and to ensure help for those who have to wait. We allow visitors, though visiting is limited and careful. When we need to adjust, we ensure they know. The average length of an inpatient stay is 12 days, but we have seen many more people needing short interventions, and more discharges back home. We cannot be a long stay option due to bed pressures, and for the same reason we have no pure respite beds.

**Specialist Community and Crisis Support** - Our specialist Advice Line is, as always, open, 24/7. The number is **01708 758643**. Please do ring for any palliative/end of life care advice or support; we are happy to give advice and support whether or not we know the patient. The CNSs are doing more by phone due to the huge volume of referrals and advice line calls, as well as for COVID-19 safety reasons, but our CNSs and doctors are still home visiting, focussing on crisis situations and on those who just cannot manage connecting by phone. A few have prescribing ability now. In a crisis situation, if they can help by prescribing crisis symptom control medications they will. As always, our District Nurse colleagues are key partners in care. We visit care home residents if they are in difficulty, with the support of the care home.

**Consultant Advice and Support** – Our Consultants are easiest to find via the Advice Line, or you can ring the hospice reception who will either be able to connect you directly with a Consultant or with someone who can arrange for a Consultant to call you back. SFH reception number: **01708 753319**. They are also happy to advise on patients who are not currently known to the hospice.

**Hospice at Home** – Our hands-on visiting team to support people at home within the last 2-3 weeks of life has continued to be busy throughout. We work closely with Marie Curie and the DN teams to ensure best spread of support, as all services are stretched. All patients must be known to the District Nursing service. If you need the service really urgently for someone actively dying (same day) we encourage you to ring. You can ring direct, on **01708 758603**.

**Day Services at Pemberton Place** – Sadly COVID-19 has hit our Day Therapy service and social groups hugely. We are still seeing outpatients by appointment if they are COVID-19 symptom free and can get here by their own transport. We are happy to see them with family/friend accompanying. We are beginning to host very small (max 4, but lockdown/tier rules dependent) social, creative and physical therapy groups, but find that most are nervous to come, despite rigorous site safety measures. We are keeping connected

with everyone who would normally be attending, including linking people virtually through use of conference calls, which people love.

**Therapies** – Our occupational and complementary therapists and our physiotherapist can deliver only very limited support at home as the team is very small, but they have developed exercise videos (see our website. [www.sfh.org.uk/terminal-illness-covid-19](http://www.sfh.org.uk/terminal-illness-covid-19) and are also running virtual 1:1 and group breathing and movement assessments and classes. Our complementary therapy teams are making and delivering aromatherapy blends alongside phone support. We continue to deliver equipment for home if we have it.

**Family Support Services** (social work, psychological support, children counselling, bereavement counselling, pastoral care) - All services are continuing, mainly via phone or a video platform, but face to face for those on the ward or who can come to the hospice for an outpatient visit. We are visiting children in the schools that allow external professionals but doing home visits only in exceptional circumstances.

**Bereavement Support** is by either phone or Zoom/MS Teams. There is high demand, but we are doing all we can to support. We will signpost people to other bereavement support if their loved one was not cared for by the hospice. Anyone can ring in to ask for support, via the hospice reception on 01708 753319 (ask for the family support team or bereavement team). No need for a referral form.

**OrangeLine** - Our helpline for isolated people, is being very well used. The focus is on people who are stable but poorly (i.e. they do not need symptom control etc. but they are life limited, and struggling), also the bereaved. Our OrangeLine team provide contact, time to chat, listening and sharing, linking with others if wanted, and signposting to useful local practical support services. You can phone direct on **01708 758649** to discuss or make a referral, as well as using our referral form.

**Education** – We offer bespoke training in palliative and end of life care, including short sessions, half and whole days as a series or a one off. All sessions are virtual, can be tailored to your learning needs. We offer Communication Skills Training and we are planning an Ethics conference for 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021, please 'save the date' – information will follow. Contact [bridgetmoss@sfh.org.uk](mailto:bridgetmoss@sfh.org.uk) for any education ask.

**GP Support** - Let us know if there is anything we can do to help you. We are supporting many GP based Palliative Care meetings now by MS Teams or Zoom; contact [janeelmer@sfh.org.uk](mailto:janeelmer@sfh.org.uk) and [mariastripe@sfh.org.uk](mailto:mariastripe@sfh.org.uk) if you are resuming your regular meets so that we can diarise support, or to start a regular practice Palliative Care meet and need help or a specific teaching session, again do let us know.

**Fundraising** - Unfortunately the coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on our funding, with our fundraising events and activities cancelled and our charity shops currently closed. We would be hugely grateful for any fundraising you can do as individuals or teams. We want to continue what we do through the pandemic and beyond, but we need to enhance our fundraising efforts to be confident of our ability to do so. To get involved visit our website at [www.sfh.org.uk](http://www.sfh.org.uk) or contact a member of our fundraising team on **01708 753319 ext. 2192** or email [fundraising@sfh.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@sfh.org.uk).

Thank you all for your continuing support and for all your work through this challenging time.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Corinna Midgley MBBS MRCGP FRCP**  
**Medical Director and Consultant in Palliative Medicine**



**Tes Smith, Director of Quality & Care & Caldicott Guardian**