

The Case for 'Care Closer to Home'

Swindon and Wiltshire patients – the Patient View

To learn of one's Head & Neck Cancer is a major shock!

The Medical Panel 'Interview' with the **Oxford Cancer Treatment Team** is the start of a long treatment journey through surgery, recovery and rehabilitation. Nothing can prepare you for the gruelling road ahead.

Head & Neck Cancer (HNC) treatment is *so* complex – involving many vital body areas – the face, throat, oesophagus, tongue, saliva glands, voice, jawbone or teeth for example - demanding numerous medical skills.

The nature of **HNC** can be devastating. Physical changes can affect how we look, can we or how we speak, what we eat or drink, and how well we swallow, if at all.

The psychological impact of all this and how we feel in ourselves commonly results in lack of confidence in returning to a reasonable life-style - anxiety regarding family or social excursions, even going out for a meal!

The surgery, radiotherapy, chemo-therapy and follow-on appointment journey spans 5 years, and requires numerous attendances typically at **Oxford HNC Blenheim Wing in the Churchill Hospital**.

A large number of follow up appointments may be needed per year with various members of the Oxford treatment team – on average around 25 per patient over the 5 years, and this is following the several journeys needed for chemo or radiotherapy.

One patient from Swindon needed 81 follow up appointments in one year.

The distance and time to travel between Swindon and Oxford can be so demanding:-

- The difficulty of travel when feeling ill or tired during treatment – up to 90 minute journeys each way if driving, then needing to add more time for Oxford traffic and parking,
- Use of public or hospital transport which overall can take a whole day for an appointment,
- Preparing suitable food/drink for a long day travelling,
- The need to be *dependent* on relatives or a carer can impact on family and working life, especially for the increasing number of younger **HNC** patients through Human Papilloma Virus!
- The impact on jobs, the family and babysitters - even if employers are supportive.
- **The cost/time of travel is a *major* issue.**

Fear/Uncertainty

Subsequently the *longer-term* after-effects of **HNC** treatments can be serious, alarming and unpredictable.

There always exists the fear of something going wrong, and knowing that help from someone with the HNC knowledge who *really* understands you is a *long way away!*

The uncertainty of treatment or advice, its availability and location-or NOT, can result in panic calls to The Oxford Blenheim Team, or worse still a visit to A & E at GWH in Swindon.

Head & Neck Cancer Rehabilitation: Care Closer to Home Project

How reassuring it will be to know that advice and rehabilitation will be available and performed by a specialist team closer to home.

Nick Crowson-Towers

HNC Survivor: Surgery – Oxford May 2004

Patient Lead 'Care Closer to Home Project'

Voluntary Supporter of Patient/Carer Groups, NHS TVCA, Macmillan