

Background

This is a call for UK research with the potential to improve end of life care. We will fund research projects which consider the care of people who are near the end of their lives, in order to generate findings that could be applicable to those with cancer as well as people with other life-limiting illnesses.

The aim of the joint Dimpleby Marie Curie Cancer Care Research Fund is to invest in research areas that are currently poorly funded nationally. The joint fund will make available £500,000 to allocate to the highest quality research in 2011–12.

The remit of this call for proposals

Support for carers is a research theme that has been highlighted in both the Department of Health's End of Life Care Strategy in 2008 [1], and the recent National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Rapid Review of Research in Survivorship After Cancer and End of Life Care, published in November 2010 [2].

We are looking to fund research in two carer-focused areas that need urgent attention:

Theme 1: The demographic characteristics and personal circumstances of those who provide unpaid care for people at the end of their lives

Currently we know little about the specific characteristics, demographics or patterns of health and illness associated with unpaid carers for people at the end of life.

Forecasts suggest that the number of deaths per year and the age at which people die will increase [3], leading to more people requiring end of life care and to an increase in clinical complexity which comes with advancing age. This suggests that the age of their carers will also increase. In this context, it is vital to understand more about the demographic characteristics and personal circumstances of unpaid carers as well as the effect on carers of providing care for people at the end of life.

A recent White Paper from the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) Task Force on Family Carers highlighted a research gap. It said: "More research is required into the personal characteristics of carers – such as age, gender, health, education, resources, life experience and relationship with the patient – as these are all likely to have an impact upon carers' willingness to take on that role and the quality of their caring." [4]

We are looking to fund research into the demographic characteristics and personal circumstances of carers, including the effect caring has on their own health. Research needs to be rigorous and methodologically sound. It should propose creative solutions to the barriers to the prospective identification of carers who (i) may not be aware of the fact that the person who they are caring for is approaching death and (ii) may not identify themselves as carers [5]. It needs to have the potential to make a fundamental contribution to future research and national policy around the issue of carers for people at the end of life.

Theme 2: Educational interventions to assist those who provide unpaid care for people at the end of their lives to gain the practical and nursing skills they need to care for patients at home

Many carers find themselves caring for somebody through to the end of their lives, without any prior knowledge or training in providing care. Help with care at home is usually provided, but few services offer 24-hour help. Carers often need to develop new skills such as basic nursing skills to be able to provide physical care. There are additional demands on carers who deal with specific challenges such as incontinence or more than one illness.

The need for practical educational interventions was recently raised in a systematic review [6]. We are keen to fund research into the practical education needs of informal caregivers. This should be methodologically sound and widely and nationally applicable.

We will also consider funding the provision and testing of educational interventions. These should be rigorously evaluated and have the potential to be transferred to other settings.

What we are looking for

We are committed to supporting work with the potential to directly improve care at the end of life

We are looking to fund a small number of proposals. We will consider applications for funding of between £50,000 and £250,000. We will consider research proposals with a higher cost if we believe them to be of exceptional quality and relevance.

Proposals should demonstrate robust research methodology incorporating qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods as appropriate. Ideally the research should compare the outcomes for people who receive new services with outcomes for people who do not.

We can pay for both the development and delivery of an intervention as well as research into the intervention.

Process and timing of the call

We invite applications led by academic institutions across the UK. We will fund projects of up to two years. In our assessment, methodological rigour and feasibility of the research will be paramount.

Bids for research funding are by application form only. These can be found at:
www.dimblebycancercare.org/research.php

The closing date for proposals for the 2011–12 research call is **October 7, 2011**. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the selection process during March 2012 and funding will be available from April 1, 2012 subject to our conditions being met.

Applications will be peer reviewed before final consideration by the Dimbleby Marie Curie Cancer Care Joint Advisory Group.

All queries should be addressed to Georgie Grindlay at Dimbleby Cancer Care. Phone: 020 7188 7889, Email: dcc-mccc.research@dimblebycancercare.org

REFERENCES

- [1] *End of Life Care Strategy*, Department of Health, July 16, 2008
- [2] *Rapid Review of Research into Survivorship after Cancer and End of Life Care*, NCRI, November 2010
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- [4] Payne, S. et al, *Eur. J. Pall. Care* 17: 238 (2010)
- [5] Funk, L, Stajduhar, KI, Toye, C, Aoun, S, Grande, GE and Todd, CJ, *Pall. Med.* 24: 594 (2010)
- [6] Bee, PE, Barnes, P and Luker, KA, *J. Clin. Nurs.* 18: 1379 (2008)

Dimbleby Cancer Care provides psychological and practical support for people affected by cancer through its Cancer Information and Support Services at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in London. The Dimbleby Cancer Care Research Fund makes grants available for national research into the support needs of people with cancer, and those of their families and carers. www.dimblebycancercare.org



Marie Curie Cancer Care provides high quality nursing, totally free, to give people with terminal cancer and other illnesses the choice of dying at home, supported by their families.

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The Dimbleby Marie Curie Cancer Care Research Fund

2011

A call for research proposals focused on informal carers



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