Palliative Access Links (PALs) Project

Final Report

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Name of service conducting the project :	Wide Bay Division of General Practice

Executive Summary

Project Background

Program/project title: Palliative Access Links (PALs) Project
Time period: 1st April 2003 to 30th May 2005
Organisation; Wide Bay Division of General Practice (WBDGP)

General Project Description

The Palliative Access Links PALs Project is an innovative program to help build community awareness of the benefits of palliative care and to encourage people who are dying and their families to seek palliative care at the most appropriate time, rather than wait until death is imminent or a crisis occurs. The PALs aim to comfort people who are dying and to support patients, families and carers in approaching death and healing grief through providing information about palliative care and/or "links" to various organisations and support services that will assist them on this difficult journey. There are more than 40 active trained PALs volunteers who serve as ambassadors for palliative care.

What prompted the PALs Project being developed?

The idea was brought about by the Bundaberg Palliative Access Reference Group who identified that there were high numbers of people with a lack of knowledge and understanding of palliative care and it's benefits and the services available.

It was believed that a number of previous situations in palliative care could have been more easily managed by patients, family and/or carers had information or access to information to assist them at their time of need been available.

It was deemed that palliative care was an uncommon subject discussed or talked about in the community, especially in reference to dying and the best way to improve the community's awareness was to train volunteers as information links.

The PALs Project commenced in April 2003 with the intention of conducting a community awareness survey and recruiting a number of survey participants to be trained as volunteer PALs.

A Brief Description of the PALs Project and Methodologies Used

A multi-disciplinary steering committee was appointed to assist the lead agency WBDGP to manage the project. Membership of the committee included representatives of a palliative care team.

A community awareness survey was conducted as part of the project plan with the main target groups being schools, work places and community groups. It was expected that this survey would generate interest from the participants to become volunteer PALs, however, this failed and other avenues were pursued such as the dissemination of promotional material mainly into business places and community newsletters.

As the project gained momentum it was decided that the project's timelines did not allow the WBDGP to canvas as widely, or in an organised fashion as possible, to attract the most suitable recruits. At this point in time a contract variation was successfully negotiated to extend the project for an additional 12 months so that a better integration into the community would result from an increased personal contact via small presentations to a number of community groups.

To ensure the PALs had a well established training platform a number of resources and tools had to be developed to assist them. This was achieved predominantly via an audit of palliative care services, support organisations and groups and included financial and legal advice. The information was collated into a synchronised format with other tools developed for the PALs to utilise and is known as the Bundaberg and Surrounding District Palliative Care Service Provider database.

There have been 3 training sessions conducted for the PALs delivered by the multi-disciplinary steering committee and project staff. In recognition that the PALs are an integral part of the palliative care team regular support group meetings are held by WBDGP for the PALs to attend at which they can report on activities undertaken, share experiences and knowledge gained and raise any queries or issues they may have. From time to time steering committee members will attend the meetings to present education and/or information as requested by the PALs.

Through the evaluation processes it has been revealed that there has been an increase in the awareness of palliative care in the community and the PALs Project have achieved outcomes far beyond any original expectations.

Some Key Achievements

All project objectives have been met except for the recruitment of PALs within the schools.

- The PALs have made over 700 community contacts via presentations and individual requests.
- The PALs have participated in community displays and information stands.
- The PALs operate as individual links within their chosen network.
- The PALs are given a resource and information kit and promotional literature which they may display in the community.
- The PALs have been instrumental in identifying a number of other opportunities, some of these have come to fruition (palliative care training in workplaces, palliative care support groups in aged care facilities).
- Additional resources have been developed upon the PALs recommendations to assist their work in the community (PALs individual business cards, guidelines on Aged and Dementia Care).

Summary

The PALs Project is an established networking framework for palliative care providers, organisations and the community to access information and links, through the PALs, about both palliative care and other relevant issues associated with this.

The project has been built on a solid administrative foundation and in turn has allowed the PALs an autonomy to go about their work. This clearly represents community capacity building and has created an avenue for sustainability. However, due to the unprecedented success of the project, it's achievements, outcomes and various opportunities that have "come to the fore" during the evolvement of the PALs Project's operations, it is imperative that the project be given provision for further development.

The PALs Project has been presented at a number of State and National workshops and conferences which has created a huge interest in the simplicity of the project and its associated concepts. In addition to this the PALs Project staff and the PALs themselves, have fielded many enquiries from other organisations and even members of the community about whether or not this service can be set up, or is available to be set up, in their area. These requests have come from not only within Queensland but other States within Australia.

We believe that the PALs Project has been able to meet a number of goals that other organisations have aspired to do but neither have the time nor opportunity to fulfil. To this end, the PALs Project has created a window that otherwise would not have been realised for many of these palliative care and other related organisations and the community to have access to or participate with.

Evidence suggests, much of the PALs Project's success can be attributed to the overall model of having a multi-disciplinary steering committee to help guide and provide expert advice, with an independent organisation such as WBDGP who plays a pivotal role and has the ability to instigate and deliver the project plan. This model provides a level playing field and appears to meet the ample requirements of a diverse range of volunteers, PALs, to provide a consistent message across a range of community vicinities.

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