

Committed to care:

Cheryl Young, Consultant Nurse at Hospice Isle of Man

‘Hospice is so much more than just a building,’ says Cheryl Young.

Cheryl should know because this summer will see her mark 25 years with Hospice Isle of Man where she works as a consultant nurse.

‘I’m as passionate now as I was when I started out in palliative and end-of-life care many years ago,’ says Cheryl, who left her native Northern Ireland in 1988 for Portsmouth where she studied for her registered nurse qualification which she gained in 1991.

She says: ‘After I qualified, I spent two years working in acute medical and end-of-life care settings and I just knew that those were the areas I wanted to specialise in.’

In 1993 Cheryl relocated to the Isle of Man to take up a post at the ‘old’ Noble’s Hospital in Westmoreland Road. ‘There I took a number of courses in palliative and end-of-life care and was fortunate to work with a fantastic ward sister, Isobel Whittle. Isobel taught me the importance of routine, knowing your patients and establishing empathy with them, advice which, as a comparatively new nurse, I found enormously valuable.’

‘Another huge influence in my career was former director of palliative care, Christine Bloomer. She was a great mentor and friend who encouraged me to develop my skills to be able to deliver the very best care based on contemporary evidence-based practice.’

In 1997 while still working at Noble’s Hospital, Cheryl became a bank nurse at Hospice, then known as St Bridget’s and located in Kensington Road, Douglas. ‘It was when I was working shifts there that I

knew this was where I wanted to be. In 1997 I joined full-time as part of the in-patient team and I’ve never looked back,’ says Cheryl. ‘When you work in palliative and end-of-life care it’s a privilege to be able to spend time with patients who are dying, to develop strong connections with them and their loved ones, and to give the best possible care you can. This is the last thing you can do for someone and it’s deeply rewarding, fulfilling and often quite humbling, it really is great to be part of such an amazing team at Hospice.’

Cheryl says she always had an ambition to develop her skills, so worked not only in the In-patient unit but also with Hospice at Home, recognising early on that some patients would prefer their care at home. She studied for a diploma in health studies, took a degree in cancer and palliative care and then went on to complete a master’s degree in ethics and cancer and palliative care.

‘End-of-life care is so much more than medicine; it’s about the holistic care of people and families. Education and training are really important parts of this as well,’ says Cheryl, who is now deputy director of the Scholl Academic Centre. ‘We work with all disciplines across the island as part of our mission to provide island-wide Hospice-influenced care.’

Cheryl has been a non-medical prescriber since 2008 and around seven years ago joined the team who contributed to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline paper on the care of dying adults in the last days of life. ‘It was a great opportunity to meet and work with so many healthcare professionals – GPs, consultants, physiotherapists, psychologists, etc. I learned so much more about palliative care.’

‘When you’re involved in training and education it never ceases to amaze me just how truly compassionate people can be; how they have a thirst for knowledge and



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are totally committed to doing the best for their patients. And in this very special line of work - where the words “death” and “dying” are part of our everyday language - we also see how much patients’ loved ones are prepared to do to work alongside us to provide comfort and care, and we do all we can to support them in this.

‘I’ve so much to be grateful to Hospice for. I’ve been supported through my studies and have learned so much. And now it’s a privilege to be sharing my skills with others.’

Cheryl is involved in the ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) capacity-building network for healthcare professionals. She explains: ‘We’re working with nursing and residential homes, care agencies and pharmacies, to share expert knowledge and experience, learn from one another and educate. It’s all part of the Hospice ethos “to be the best we can” and is an example of how Hospice is so much more than just a building.’

Turning to recent developments in UK healthcare legislation Cheryl says: I welcomed the news that

NHS England had legislated for end-of-life care to be a right for everyone who would benefit, which will end the “post code lottery”. This is an area that Hospice will lobby Tynwald to accept, ensuring end-of-life care is accessible to all as a right, across our island.’

Away from work Cheryl is married to Sean and the couple, who live in Douglas, have a daughter, Amber, who is studying law at Aberdeen University. ‘I’m very fortunate to have a fantastic husband in Sean, who doesn’t work in healthcare but has always been very supportive and a great listener. We have some really good friends which, in this job, is so important, because you need to switch off sometimes.’

Cheryl is now considering studying for a PhD but before then, there’s a new string to her professional bow she’s looking to add. Along with managing the demands and sensitivities of end-of-life care, education, training and research, she will be grappling with the intricacies of punctuation and spelling. She explains: ‘I’m hoping to write an article for a professional healthcare journal. Now that will be a real challenge.’