

NORTHERN AREA HEALTH BOARD

Report No 17/2001

CANCER SERVICES

1. Introduction

In 1994, the **Health Strategy 'Shaping a Healthier Future'** stated that a significant level of premature mortality due to cancer (i.e. under 65 yrs) could be prevented and that related risk factors were smoking, alcohol, nutrition/diet and lifestyle. It set a medium term target, to reduce the death rate from cancer in the under 65 age group by 1570 in the ten year period from 1994

A **National Cancer Strategy Group** was established by the Minister for Health in 1994 to:

- Outline the epidemiology of cancer in Ireland and internationally.
- Assess the impact of cancer on Irish people and the health service.
- Examine the current provision of cancer services.
- Make recommendations for the future organisation of the service.

The report **Cancer Services in Ireland: A National Strategy** was produced in 1996.

The main objectives of the cancer strategy are to:

- Take all measures to reduce the rates of illness and death due to cancer.
- Ensure that those who develop cancer receive the most effective care and treatment and that their quality of life is enhanced to the greatest extent possible.

In 1999, the Department of Health and Children commissioned the Eastern Health Board's Department of Public Health to undertake the first **National Review of Support Services for Patients with cancer**. The review group made recommendations on the development and provision of cancer support services.

The Eastern Health Board produced its Interim Cancer Plan in 1998. This led to the implementation process of the National Cancer Strategy through the provision of regional information on cancer incidence, health promotion initiatives, development of hospital services, co-ordination of hospital, primary care and palliative care services. This implementation process also included:

- *A needs assessment for Specialist Palliative Care Services in the Eastern Health Board Area (1999)*
- *Identification of the support systems for patients and their families.*

2. Services.

A multi-disciplinary approach is provided in the treatment of cancer. Treatment services are provided at the Mater, Beaumont and James Connolly Memorial Hospitals. Oncology services are provided at the Mater and Beaumont Hospitals. The treatment provided may include surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Out-patient oncology services, mainly chemotherapy, is also provided at both of these hospitals. The management of the treatment and support for the patient is also provided by our community services, primarily through the General Practitioner and Public Health nursing services.

One of the major developments which took place in recent years was the creation of posts of Cancer Nurse Co-ordinator. The Cancer Nurse Co-ordinator liaises closely with the Specialist Treatment Units and the patient who may be hospital or community based. Each of the Co-ordinators work with specific cancer groups and are a source of information and support for patients and their families. A review of this service has taken place and will be published shortly.

Palliative Care Services including in-patient (19 beds), home care and day care services are provided in our Board's area by the Daughters of Charity at and from St. Francis Hospice, Raheny. There is one Consultant post in Palliative Care Medicine attached to this service. This post also has sessions at Beaumont Hospital. Funding has been provided for a second post of Consultant in Palliative Care Medicine in our Board's area and is referred to later in this report under service developments.

On foot of the report of the sub-group to the National Cancer Forum on 'Development of Services for Symptomatic Breast Disease', two breast units are being provided in our Boards area – one in the Mater Hospital and the other provided jointly by Beaumont and James Connolly Memorial Hospitals.

3. Service Developments

Additional funding of £8.755m has been provided for the development of services in the Eastern region in 2001. This will allow for the following developments:

- The costs associated with the increased uptake in services arising from Breast Check.
- The development of the symptomatic service in other hospitals.
- The increased costs of oncology drugs.

BreastCheck Programme

The BreastCheck screening programme commenced in February 2000 in the Eastern Region. BreastCheck aims to reduce mortality in women aged between 50 and 64 years, who attend for screening, by at least 20%. Women in the age cohort who reside in our Board's area (29,920) are issued letters of invitation to attend for screening, in the Eccles Unit on the campus of the Mater Hospital. It is estimated that a 70% uptake rate will ensure the success of the screening programme. The uptake in our Board's area is averaging 68-70%.

Our Board has appointed a co-ordinator to work with BreastCheck to establish a more locally based approach to secure maximum uptake. In addition, a range of initiatives are currently being undertaken to ensure maximum up-take.

Additional funding is being provided to the Mater Hospital this year to meet increased demand for treatment arising from referrals from the BreastCheck programme.

Symptomatic Breast Disease

In March 2000, the Department of Health and Children published a report 'Development of Services for Symptomatic Breast Disease' – report of the sub group to the National Cancer Forum. A sum of £0.915m has been allocated for the implementation of the report in the Eastern Region.

Oncology and Haematology Services

A sum of £2m has been provided in 2001 for the appointment of Consultant Haematologists in accordance with recommendations of Comhairle na nOspideal.

Oncology Drugs

A sum of £2.5m has been provided in 2001 to cover the costs of expensive oncology medications within oncology units in the Eastern region. This funding is being made directly to the hospitals concerned, including the Mater and Beaumont hospitals.

Nurse Education

A total of £0.05m has been provided in 2001 for oncology nurse education, in association with UCD in the Eastern region.

Prosthesis Services

A sum of £0.085m has been provided in 2001 for the support of prosthesis services in the Dublin hospitals.

Counselling Services.

A sum of £0.1m has been provided in 2001 for the development of counselling and support services in the Eastern region.

Cervical Screening Cytology

A sum of £0.45m has been made available in 2001 for the development of cervical screening and cytology services in the Eastern region.

Palliative Care Services

Funding has been provided in 2001 to cover the full year cost of a second post of Consultant in Palliative Care Medicine in our Board's area. This post will be structured as follows:

- Mater Hospital – 4 sessions.
- St. Francis Hospice – 4 sessions.
- James Connolly Memorial Hospital – 3 sessions.

This post will be advertised shortly.

Following the adoption of the report 'A Needs Assessment for Specialist Palliative Care Services in the Eastern Health Board Area' in 1999, the Eastern Health Board and St. Francis Hospice specifically reviewed Palliative Care needs in North Dublin having particular regard to services being provided by St. Francis Hospice. This review, primarily identified a need to develop home care and day care services in and from a base in Dublin Northwest. Staff of this Board and St. Francis Hospice are currently formulating a development plan for palliative care services in our Board's area. Proposals will be included in our Boards provider plan for 2002.

4. Health Promotion.

Cancer prevention initiatives are an integral component of health promotion programmes and in particular include the following:

- Anti-smoking action plans
- Community nutrition programmes.
- Self-examination for breast cancer and testicular cancer.
- Initiatives being developed in partnership with the Irish Cancer Society in relation to smoking, sun exposure and early detection programmes.

**M. Windle,
Chief Executive**

17th May, 2001