

e-learning

A Useful Teaching Resource For Benefits?

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Background

Money worries are known to be a major concern for people affected by cancer. The state benefit system can be complicated to navigate, especially at a time of emotional distress. Not all benefits are 'means tested' and patients may not be aware of their entitlement to benefits.

Many health professionals are reluctant to enquire about a patient's financial worries. They may not see it as part of their role and they may also be lacking in awareness of local resources to which they could refer patients for help.

e-learning is a new teaching resource enabling participants to undertake training over the internet. Flexibility can be in-built to accommodate a workforce environment or home-learning. Online facilitation is also possible.

Purpose

The study aimed to increase patient uptake of benefits within a large cancer centre by improving professionals' awareness of benefits using a blended e-learning programme developed by Macmillan Cancer Support.

Method

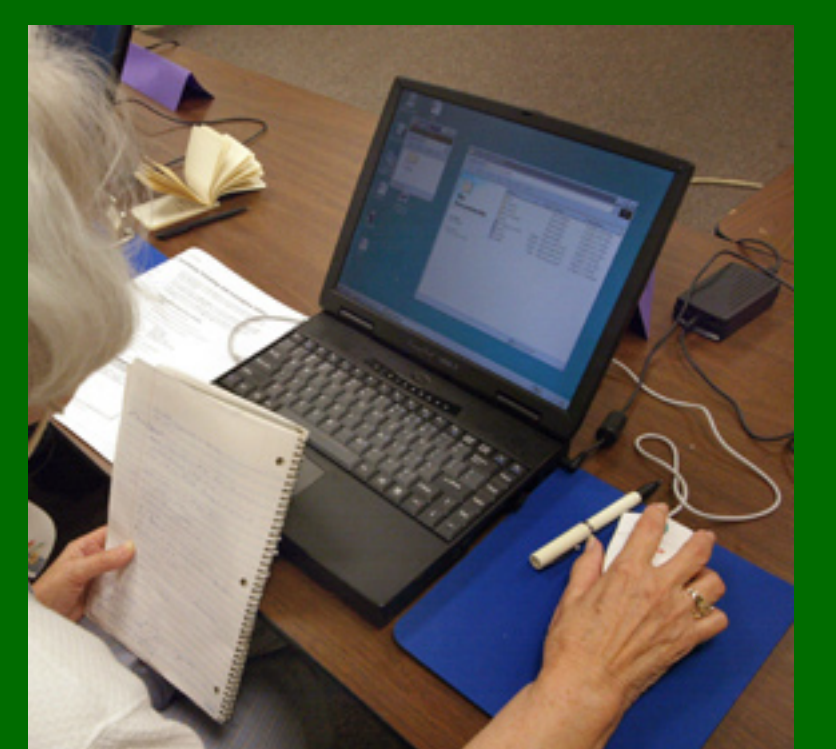
The e-learning programme is delivered to staff in successive cohorts of approximately 15 participants. Prior to the commencement of the first cohort, for one day only, every patient attending the cancer centre for radiotherapy was asked to anonymously record whether they were receiving, or had recently applied, for benefits (n=100). (Table 1) Details of each course are circulated around the cancer centre and 18 staff applied for the first cohort. One dropped out before the course started and one dropped out during the course for personal reasons. 16 participants completed the course and 13 filled in both pre and post evaluation forms. (Tables 1 & 2) The participants met for a face-to-face session for two hours prior to the course to receive a short demonstration about e-learning, view the website and meet the online facilitator. They completed a pre-course evaluation form covering existing benefit awareness and confidence. (Tables 1 & 3) They were then asked to complete the e-learning tasks and assignments in 5 weeks before meeting again. Participants then completed a post-course evaluation. (Tables 1 & 3) One month after the course finished patients were surveyed again in the cancer centre (n=129). (A second cohort has just finished (late November) but not yet been evaluated.) Further courses are planned and the aim is to recruit over 100 staff including doctors.

e-learning

The e-learning course is freely available on the Macmillan Learn Zone.
<http://learnzone.macmillan.org.uk>

Our participants completed an extended version of the course - A Blended Learning Programme. This included face-to-face sessions to introduce and close the course plus access to an online facilitator.

The course took 6 weeks to complete with approximately 10 hours spent 'online'. Course content included a quiz; interactive on-line learning material and exercises; an on-line peer discussion forum using live case material brought by the participants and finally face-to-face presentations of a small piece of research into one aspect of benefits. This last exercise was carried out in pairs.



Results

Only 2 participants had done any e-learning before and prior to the face-to-face briefing 6 of the participants were not very confident about using e-learning, only 2 remained sceptical. Four completed the course entirely at home, 3 entirely at work and 6 utilised both. 5 of the participants were unable to make time to complete the course during work hours or claim lieu time for home working. 5 participants had difficulty accessing a computer both at home and work. Access to the website was easy, and although Flash was desirable it was not essential. Four participants would prefer face-to-face learning in future and found the facilitated discussion forum complicated and did not enjoy the interactive nature. There were some specific comments to improve the course content and keep a record of progress, and for the second course and subsequent courses the facilitator will be experienced in benefits advice as well as e-learning facilitation.



Table 2
Participants

Participants	No.
Therapy Radiographers	8
Oncology Lecturer Practitioners	2
Research Nurses	3
Haematology CNS	1
Information Centre Manager	1
Ward Staff Nurse	1
Volunteer	1
Speech Therapist	1

Table 1
Health Professional Awareness of Different Benefits & Patient Benefit Uptake Pre & Post Course

BENEFIT	Never heard of		Not Confident		Reasonably Confident		Confident		Patient Uptake	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Income Support			15	4		9			5%	6%
Child Tax Credit			13	7	2	6			11%	6%
Working Tax Credit	1		12	6	2	7			5%	5%
Pension Credit	2		12	10	1	3			8%	10%
Housing Benefits			15	6		7			7%	9%
Council Tax Benefits			13	4	2	9			12%	7%
Social Fund Grants/Loans	3		12	3		9		1	2%	3%
Help with health costs e.g. prescriptions	1		12	2	2	11			18%	9%
Jobseekers Allowance			15	10		3			2%	3%
Statutory Sick Pay			12	1	3	12			11%	10%
Incapacity Benefit	1		14	4		9			7%	6%
Disability Living Allowance	1		14	6		7			11%	9%
Attendance Allowance	2		13	7		6			4%	5%
Carers Allowance			15	6		7			6%	6%
Disabled Parking Sticker			12	3	2	9	1	1	19%	13%
RADAR Key	4	2	8	5	1	5	1	1	3%	4%
Macmillan Grants	2		8	1	2	10	2	2	3%	4%

Pre Post

Table 3
Health Professional Confidence Pre & Post Course

	Pre course		Post course		
	Low	High	Less Confident	Same	More Confident
Confidence to raise finances with patients	13	2	0	2	11
Confidence to respond to patients questions about finances	10	6	0	1	12
Confidence in making referral	5	10	0	5	8
Awareness of local services offering benefits advice	10	2	0	7	6

Conclusions

e-learning is a useful teaching aid for benefit awareness amongst health professionals in a cancer centre. Confidence and awareness of benefits were raised but it is too soon to see if this impacts on patient uptake and satisfaction. Where staff are busy and would be unable to attend lengthy face-to-face courses it does provide an opportunity for home-learning but this should not be expected.



BENEFITS AWARENESS

MACMILLAN LEARN ZONE

