

## Written evidence submitted by CLIC Sargent (WBR0021)

CLIC Sargent is the UK's leading cancer charity for children and young people. When cancer strikes young lives CLIC Sargent helps families limit the damage cancer causes beyond their health, providing nurses, social workers, financial grants and a place to stay during treatment in our Homes from Home next to hospitals. We fight tirelessly for young cancer patients – we're there giving emotional, financial and practical support. Last year we reached over 23,000 young cancer patients and their families across the UK, and grants totaling over £1.2 million were given to help young cancer patients and their families cope with the costs of cancer.

### Social care support for children and young people with cancer

The Cancer Service Guideline [CSG7] 'Improving outcomes in children and young people with cancer' states:

**'The provision of appropriate psychosocial support to children, young people and their families is complex and multidimensional. Multi-agency patterns of support are required. The provision of support from social care professionals has relied heavily on voluntary sector funding.'**

Even though age appropriate social care support is acknowledged as a vital part of children and young people's cancer care CLIC Sargent is the only body, whether third sector or government body, that provides this kind of support.

Our social workers are experts in helping families handle the day-to-day challenges that come with a child's cancer diagnosis. Working in all the main children and young people's cancer hospitals, they work closely with doctors, nurses and other NHS professionals as an integral part of the team caring for children with cancer.

Our social workers can help with:

- Helping a family come to terms with what's happened
- Explaining what things mean in a way that's easy to understand
- Helping families adjust to the new situation they find themselves in, and working out how it will affect day-to-day life
- Support with applying for benefits, grants and other financial support
- Talking to a child's school and helping to arrange schoolwork during treatment
- Helping parents sort out time off work
- Support with arranging accommodation for families close to hospital
- Helping organise childcare for siblings
- Supporting brothers and sisters and other family members
- Connecting with organisations that can give additional support.

At present CLIC Sargent employs 95 full time social workers across the UK.

### How have social care staff been impacted by Covid-19?

According to an organisational survey undertaken in May 2020 71% of our services staff feel the current crisis has had an impact on the wellbeing at work.

During the pandemic, our social care teams, like many age appropriate additional supportive care staff, were unable to work in the hospitals and were required to work from home supporting children and young people with cancer. As they adapted to working digitally this presented new challenges, such as maintaining boundaries between work and home life – for example, having challenging and traumatic conversations while in their home environment. Ordinarily the home is a refuge and offers separation from the challenges of work, the circumstances have made this more difficult.

This was particularly challenging for social workers where their cases involved palliative patients. Ordinarily we would be helping palliative children and young people to achieve their wishes or final memories and this was unable to take place due to public spaces and buildings being closed.

It has been more challenging connecting with new referrals to our services. Ordinarily time can be spent supporting a family through a new diagnosis in the hospital, but staff have had to adjust to building and maintaining relationships primarily over the phone and virtually. Families, both old and new to our services, experienced additional anxiety due to the pandemic, and staff have been dealing with what has felt to be a particularly emotionally intense caseload during this time. CLIC Sargent has worked to ensure we can support the mental health of all of our staff even more so through these difficult circumstances. Due to being unable to access any of the Government financial support package for charities CLIC Sargent had to take measures to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for non social care staff, as well as reducing the hours of a significant portion of staff work to 80%. Social workers could not be furloughed due to the high demand for their support, however the difficult decision was made to temporarily reduce their hours to enable the organisation to be able to continue to fund the support they provide.

NHS trusts asked us to keep our services going as long as possible, at a time when they felt the families needed us most. Many of our social workers sit as part of a multi-disciplinary team but the separation from the hospital has made this relationship harder and some social workers have felt more separate from NHS teams during this period.

### The future

Due to the way in which coronavirus has impacted charities it is likely our services will need to change in upcoming months. CLIC Sargent has seen a £9m drop in income. We are a vital part of the health and social care system with the services pathway for children and young people with cancer but are increasingly concerned that the Department of Health and Social Care do not recognise this in the same way as the devolved NHS's. CLIC Sargent are currently taking on the responsibility of providing this social care service while being dramatically financially impacted.

In some cases our social workers will be able to go back to the hospitals, by appointment or clinic once a week on a rota basis, while following strict guidelines. We will not yet be going back to visiting families in the community apart from some individual cases where a young person might have no one with them during a diagnosis, or when a family is facing palliation or bereavement. This will also be impacted by the comfort levels of the young person or family.

### What measures are we putting in place to ensure the resilience of our workforce?

We have temporarily secured support for our staff from the Laura Hyde Foundation who work to ensure mental health support for medical and emergency personnel. One of our Nurse Educators has also been sharing mental health support materials from her local trust which they agreed could be shared. We also have an existing Employee Assistance Scheme that we encourage all staff to use.

CLIC Sargent has also encouraged teams to connect more during this time, having virtual coffees or time to chat. Additional leave has been provided to acknowledge the impact of this sudden change to the work we have all experienced.

However, it is likely that our social care staff will continue to work within a system under increasing pressure, and against the backdrop of a challenging time ahead for the organisation, with a drop in funds and donations. At present CLIC Sargent has been unable to access any Government support throughout the pandemic. In addition to maintaining sufficient resources to support services we need to maintain support for staff such as regular supervision, more frequent team meetings and flexible working. These are important factors in enabling the social care workforce and their wellbeing and resilience.

While considering measures to achieve parity between both health and social care workers we urge the committee to consider factoring in those provided for by third sector organisations that work closely with NHS and local authority providers.

**For more information please contact Policy and Public Affairs Officer**

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