

Complementary Therapy Service, Ward 1, East Lothian Community Hospital

Doctors in Ward 1 at East Lothian Community Hospital (ELCH) received £3,985 from NHS Lothian Charity's Specific Funds to create a Complementary Therapy Service for patients and their families over a 12-month period. Ward 1 cares for frail and elderly patients with complex medical conditions, many of whom are experiencing significant symptoms, declining health, or require specialist palliative and end of life care. For patients who spend extended periods in hospital, often in single rooms and away from their usual support networks, hospital life can be challenging for patients in so many ways. For family members of patients in end of life care, complementary therapy helps to manage stress, cope with grief and find moments of calm during an emotionally challenging time. It can help prevent the need for more intensive support later, such as mental health services to help them cope with grief.

To deliver the service, the doctors appointed a Complementary Therapist, Lynne-Marie, who has experience in supporting people with complex health conditions and those approaching the end of life. The Therapist visits the ward weekly, working closely with the medical team to provide safe, personalised support tailored to each patient's physical condition and emotional wellbeing. Patients and family members are referred by ward staff, and all therapy is delivered at the patient's bedside and aligned with clinical guidance and individual preferences.

The Service also works alongside the East Lothian Community Complementary Therapy Service for palliative care patients (also funded by NHS Lothian Charity), ensuring continuity of support to a few patients who have received therapy at home and are later admitted to Ward 1 due to a deterioration in their condition. This provides a familiar source of comfort and reassurance at a time when many patients and their families feel anxious, vulnerable and uncertain.

110

therapeutic interventions
have been delivered by the
Service in it's first year (the
majority being patients).



Lynne-Marie, Complementary Therapist, Ward 1, ELCH

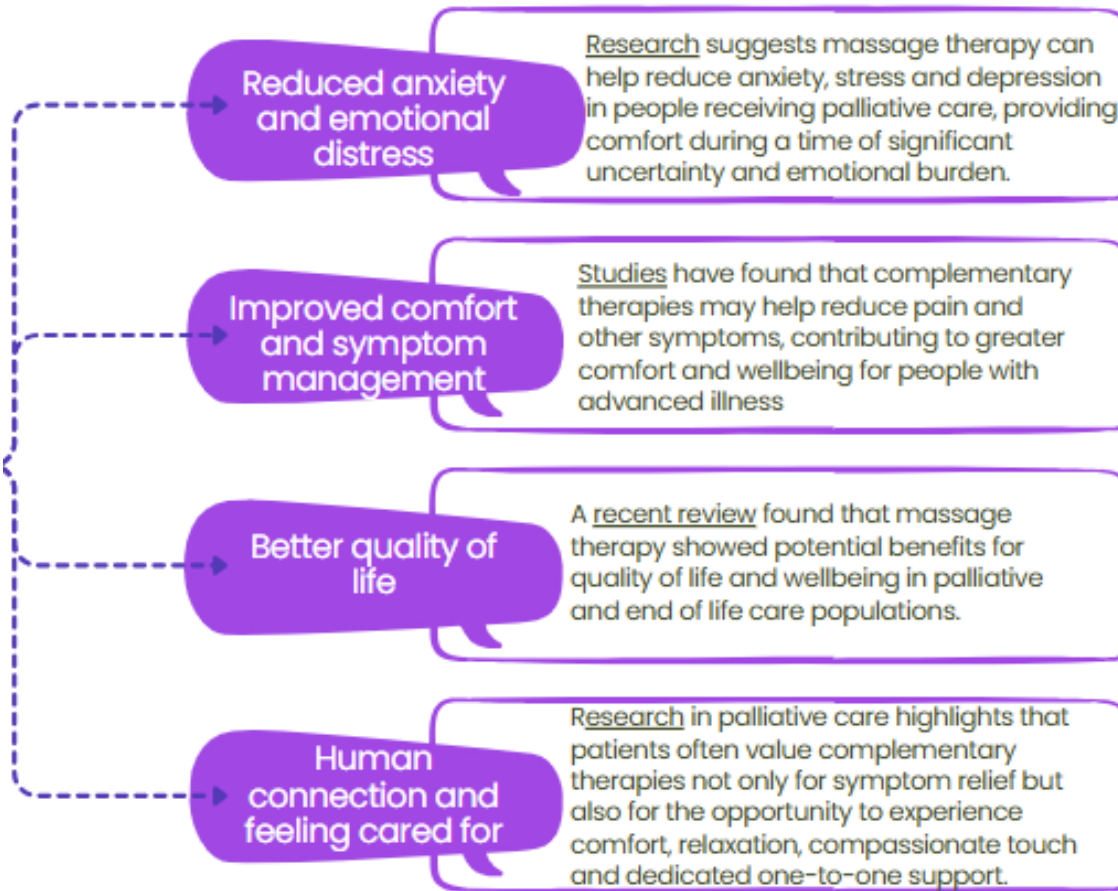
Why complementary therapy in Ward 1, ELCH

Dr. Buchanan explains: "Complementary therapy gives patients and families in Ward 1 the opportunity to relax, switch off for a while and, for a short period each week, forget that they are in hospital. As we do not currently have dedicated spiritual care support within the hospital, the Service also helps people who are experiencing distress or struggling to come to terms with a worsening condition. The service is a non-medical support that complements the care we deliver."

Impact on patients receiving palliative care



There is a growing body of research showing that complementary therapies, particularly massage, therapeutic touch, reflexology and aromatherapy, can benefit people receiving palliative care by helping them manage symptoms, relax and improve their quality of life.



Impacts shared by NHS Lothian staff



The biggest impact has been being able to offer non-pharmacological treatment options to patients. It may be to help with leg cramps, or anxiety, or simply to give them a little bit of normality. It's also been a big help with pain management.

People often spend the last days and weeks of their lives here in a hospital environment and it means a lot to be able to offer them some personalised attention."

Dr Buchanan, Ward 1



For the relatives that have had complementary therapy, they have really found benefit from it in terms of relaxation and time spent with them. As we have not had any chaplaincy input, having an extra person supporting relatives with therapeutic support at a stressful and tiring time can make a big difference."

Dr Fraser, Ward 1

Impact on patient's physical and mental wellbeing

100%

agreed (78% strongly agreed)
the therapeutic support
improved their ability to relax

 "Relaxed me for a few days after."
Patient

 "Helped calm me. It's really relaxing."
Patient

 "It's been lovely and relaxing and I have looked forward to the therapists visit every week."
Patient

100%

agreed (78% strongly agreed)
the therapeutic support
improved their mood/outlook

 "It's a lot about interacting with the therapist too. I really enjoy it – it makes me feel more positive."
Patient

 "Breaks up the monotony. I feel more relaxed and more positive as a result."
Patient

90%

agreed (55% strongly agreed)
the therapeutic support
reduced pain/discomfort

 "I found it helped with my skin itching and circulation. The reduced itching meant better sleep."
Patient

 "Helps with aches and pains and it feels like people care. It's the interacting with people too – it's good for me – mind and body."
Patient



Complementary therapy is beneficial for patients who are very ill or receiving palliative care, helping to ease pain, discomfort and emotional distress when symptoms can be difficult to control. By promoting relaxation and wellbeing, it helps patients feel calmer, more comfortable and supported.

 "One patient I supported was an amputee experiencing significant pain, itchiness and phantom limb symptoms. I worked with him throughout his time on the ward, adapting therapy to help ease his discomfort. He had very little family support and greatly valued spending time with someone outside of the clinical team. When he was preparing to move into a care home, I was able to support him through this significant life change, offering comfort, reassurance and a listening ear, helping to make the transition feel less stressful and anxious."

Lynne-Marie, Complementary Therapist

Case Study: Reducing discomfort with a tailored approach to therapeutic support

Complementary therapy provided both physical and emotional benefits for Sam during a prolonged admission to Ward 1, ELCH. The therapeutic support helped to alleviate discomfort associated with a DVT, offered a non-medical source of support, and introduced a valued sense of routine and anticipation into hospital life. By working collaboratively with the wider clinical team, therapeutic support was tailored safely to Sam's needs, demonstrating how complementary therapies can enhance longer inpatient periods of care.

Lynne-Marie, Complementary Therapist shared:

"I have been working with Sam since admission to the ward 4 months ago. Due to the complexity of the DVT, I worked closely with the clinical team to fully understand the condition and identify a safe approach. We also sought advice from a relevant specialist charity to ensure best practice and patient safety.

"Together, we developed a plan that avoided any massage above the ankle and focused on techniques that could be delivered safely. Throughout the process, the emphasis has been on person-centred care, adapting the therapy to Sam's changing needs while working within clinical guidance.

"As well as supporting physical comfort, the sessions provide an opportunity for conversation, connection and emotional support. Over time, I have seen the importance of the therapeutic support not only in helping to manage discomfort, but also in providing a positive and meaningful focus during a lengthy hospital stay."

Sam shared:

"Being in hospital for four months really throws you off balance. The days can all blend into one another. I woke up one morning wondering whether it was Monday or Tuesday, and then I realised it was Monday, which meant it was complementary therapy day. I really look forward to it.
(*On average patients and their families can have 3-4 treatments from the therapist)

"I have a DVT in one foot, which can be very painful. It often feels like there's a clamp around my foot. Because of this, the therapeutic support has focused on my other foot using massage techniques. Physically, it has made a real difference. The pain feels less intense, and we've been making progress and I feel that little bit better which I didn't expect.

"It breaks up the week and gives me something positive to look forward to. Mentally, it helps knowing I'm in the hands of someone who understands what they're doing and is focused on my individual needs. The ward staff are fantastic, but it's nice to see a different face and get some treatment."

Thanks to the Complementary Therapist and Ward 1 staff for supporting this evaluation. As mentioned in the report, NHS Lothian Charity also funds the Complementary Therapy Service for Palliative Care patients and their families living in East Lothian and also Complementary Therapy Services at Western General Hospital, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and St. John's Hospital. Read about the impact of these Services on the [NHS Lothian Charity Website](#).

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity