

# CASE STUDY

## UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS BIRMINGHAM NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

### About University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust:

- One of the first NHS organisations to be awarded Foundation Trust status
- Runs regional cancer centre, second largest renal dialysis programme in UK and largest solid organ transplantation programme in Europe
- Runs highly specialist cardiac and liver services, and a regional neuroscience and major trauma centre
- Hosts the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine
- Employs more than 9,000 staff
- Largest single hospital site in the country
- 1,383 inpatient beds, 34 operating theatres and 100 critical unit beds
- Hosts the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Surgical Reconstruction and Microbiology Research Centre (SRMRC)
- Partner in the Institute of Translational Medicine clinical research facility
- Supported improvements at George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust and Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust
- Named a Global Digital Exemplar trust for fast-tracking digital development and skills

### What was the business challenge?

In 2010, the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham opened, which had 40% of beds in single rooms. Feedback from the bereavement service questionnaire, Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) staff and complaints suggested that at times patients and relatives in single rooms felt isolated and ignored by staff. These comments were discussed with staff in focus groups, where initially staff said that they felt reluctant to intrude on private family time. On further discussion the staff said that they didn't always know the patients and families due to their shift patterns and felt awkward about starting a conversation (especially when someone was dying); and they didn't know what to say.

Following a service review of end of life care delivered at the Trust, the main issues that were highlighted were: dying patients and their families felt a lack of comfort and support; staff lacked confidence and skills in speaking to them; and there was a general communications gap. In addition, the Trust's National Patient Experience Survey results for the question about whether patients had someone to talk to about their worries and fears were mediocre, in line with other trusts nationally.



L-R: Annette Adkins, Lucy Clakett, Derek Ball, Lisa Magjill, Catherine Claridge, Ruth DeMaine and Tracy Nightingale

### Why was SAGE & THYME training the solution?

At the time, the Department of Health National End of Life Care programme was in existence, and this recommended SAGE & THYME training as an effective workshop for teaching staff how to speak to people with worries and concerns. Tracy Nightingale (Lead Nurse End of Life Care, Bereavement and Chaplaincy Services) and two colleagues attended the SAGE & THYME Foundation Level workshop to see what it was like - they realised the skills taught were universal and could be useful for any group of staff.

## How was the training adopted?

The Chief Nurse was supportive of the Trust adopting the SAGE & THYME training. In addition, the Trust Board was aware of the need for action as it received reports from the Care Quality Group on the end of life care themes identified for improvement, including the communication issues. The Trust therefore agreed to fund three members of staff to be trained as SAGE & THYME facilitators, and to pay for licence fees and delegate packs.

They started running workshops in 2013 – these went well. But, with only 3 facilitators available (the minimum number required to run the workshop), other commitments, annual leave and sickness made the training hard to deliver. Tracy therefore promoted the training to key senior staff and shared the data from the workshop's delegate questionnaire. This led to the Trust providing funding to train up 12 more facilitators and agreeing to add the SAGE & THYME Foundation Level workshop to the core training and development offering to staff. The Trust has held both an organisational and a network licence over the years – it currently has an organisational licence as the local community staff and third sector volunteers find it too difficult to commit the time to attend a workshop, so a network licence is not required.



Workshops are currently held every two months in addition to running ad hoc workshops as requested. They are attended mainly by allied health professions (AHPs), registered and unregistered nurses, administrative support staff, volunteers, doctors, estates and ancillary staff. Participants generally enjoy the training and interest in it has grown around the Trust by word of mouth.

## What are the benefits of the training?

- Can be taught to a mixed group of staff (from consultants to ward clerks).
- Helpful to non-clinical staff, such as booking clerks, who deal with people in distress.
- Good training to provide to volunteers who visit and spend time with in-patients.
- PALS team have received positive feedback on their approach after attending the workshop.
- Skills taught can be applied to different situations.
- Staff who have received advanced communications skills training find the SAGE & THYME structure helpful.

# TIPS

## What tips do you have for others wishing to run the SAGE & THYME Foundation Level workshop?

1. Gain sufficient funding to make the training sustainable beyond the first year.
2. Ensure you can provide refreshments during the break.
3. Make SAGE & THYME part of your organisation's core training.  
Gain support from senior managers by giving a relevant example on how SAGE & THYME might be helpful to them (e.g. can also be used as a performance management tool for staff with the additional benefit of staff feeling supported rather than being penalised for poor performance).
4. Get commitment from your manager regarding the time you need to establish and maintain the training.
5. Have a lead SAGE & THYME person who can organise the training and support the facilitators.
6. Talk to training leads about having administrative support for booking rooms, agreeing dates with trainers, organising packs etc.
7. Try and recruit facilitators from different areas (not just training and development staff).
8. Run the SAGE & THYME Foundation Level workshop regularly to maintain your skills as a facilitator.
9. Use the resources (e.g. poster) provided by SAGE & THYME to promote the workshop.
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## About SAGE & THYME

The SAGE & THYME Foundation Level workshop was created by staff and a patient at University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust, to teach all staff how to listen and respond to patients/clients or carers who are distressed or concerned. It places published research evidence about effective communication skills within a memorable structure for clinical practice.

To discuss how SAGE & THYME could benefit your organisation, please ring Rachael/Mandy on **0161 291 4210** or email **sageandthyme@uhsm.nhs.uk**.

Web site: **[www.sageandthymetraining.org.uk](http://www.sageandthymetraining.org.uk)**