

Cancer care model provides safety net for patients and their families



Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital does on average 150 bone marrow transplants in one year.

Above: Nicholas Bridgeman and his mum, Sue.

At just 29 years of age, Nicholas Bridgeman is already fighting his second battle with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia.

Nicholas was first treated for the blood cancer in 2010 and went into remission, but relapsed in 2014.

He received a bone marrow transplant at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH) in March, and attends the Oncology Day Therapy Unit (ODTU) as an outpatient for blood transfusions.

When Nicholas was discharged from RBWH following the bone marrow transplant, he received information on possible symptoms and contact details to use without delay if he felt unwell at home.

RBWH Cancer Care Services has long used this model of care, which enables outpatients like Nicholas to avoid unnecessary trips to the Emergency

Department and overnight admission. Through early detection, most symptoms can be managed within the ambulatory and day therapy units.

"The important message we give our patients is to address symptoms early, and that no issue is too trivial," said Gillian Nasato, Acting Nursing Director, RBWH Cancer Care Services.

When Nicholas's temperature spiked to 39 degrees in April, his mum Sue called the number provided. After discussing his symptoms, staff encouraged Nicholas to return to the Day Therapy Unit immediately and he was admitted to hospital when a bed became available.

After a few weeks of inpatient care, Nicholas was well enough to return home.

"One phone call can be enough to reassure the patient, establish a treatment plan or determine if it is, in fact, necessary for the patient to present to the Emergency Department," Gillian said.

"The patients are also given an information card to present if an ambulance must be called, to ensure the specialist care required can be provided on arrival at hospital.

"Feedback shows that cancer patients feel less alone knowing there is someone to call for advice, support, treatment, and a plan for feeling better."

Family and friends of patients undergoing treatment for cancer are also supportive of the model as it is perceived as providing a safety net for their loved one. This has certainly been the case for Nicholas and Sue.

The Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital is the only organisation in Queensland listed with the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry. All Queensland donors must come to the hospital for assessment and collection of stem cells.

Excellence in cancer care research

The Cancer Nursing Professorial Precinct aims to bring the brightest minds together and embed research into clinical practice. This strategic collaboration between cancer nurses at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Metro North Hospital and Health Service and the world-class academics at Queensland University of Technology, fosters innovation in a highly complex and challenging area of healthcare. The Precinct was established by visionary leaders in Cancer Care to inspire and motivate nurses to contribute, develop, learn, innovate and create.

The Precinct has enabled an open channel for collaboration and communication between managers, clinicians and academics; regular on-site research and practice development consultation clinics with a Professor of Cancer Nursing; and effective leadership strategies for the dissemination and uptake of latest knowledge generated by the Precinct.

The Precinct is guided by eight principles which are essential for ensuring all initiatives within the Precinct are truly consumer-centred and are enhancing cost-effective clinical practice.

