Support the family with a child suffering from advanced cancer by palliative care home care nurse: a case study

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The Children’s Cancer Foundation (CCF) has established a pediatric palliative home care service since November of 1999. The target group of patients under this service are children with cancer who are under the care of five major HA hospitals in Hong Kong. There are three nurses in the team who work in collaboration with other professional workers in CCF and other disciplines from the five referring hospitals. The aim of palliative home care service is to provide specialized palliative nursing care for children with incurable cancer and their families, and enable these children to stay at home as far as possible, using in-hospital days only when absolutely necessary. The goal of palliative nursing care is to provide physical and emotional comfort for the child and family. Bereavement care will be provided to family after the child’s death. Palliative home care service has served 70% of the children who have died of childhood cancer every year.

Ray was a 14-year-old boy who had been suffering from brain tumour for two years.

Ray received surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Unfortunately, his disease relapsed and palliative care was recommended. Ray and his parents accepted the referral. They wished to have good quality of life at the terminal stage. Ray was living with his parents and his elder brother. Their relationship was good and they were well supported by other family members and friends. Ray’s mother was the main carer and she was capable of caring Ray at home. Ray wished to stay at home until death. Finally, he died peacefully with the companion of his brother and parents at home.

"他需要陪伴、需要愛…很有質素的離開。"

Ray was referred to CCF Palliative home care service by his attending doctor one month before his death. Home care nurse visited Ray, either at home or in the hospital, whenever he and his family deemed necessary. Home care nurse assisted the family in giving physical care, primarily by instructing and supervising his mother in procedures and techniques needed to provide comfort to Ray. Frequent telephone consultations kept the home care nurse informed of the updated condition of Ray. Home care nurse helped the family members to deal with any problems that might arise, and helped the family to obtain the needed supplies and equipment to provide quality care for Ray.

"There is no place like home..."

Home care nurses are a source of information from which the family draws to enable themselves to care for the dying child in a way that is compatible with their chosen lifestyle. Symptom management is one of the most important elements to improve the quality of life of the child.