

## Hospice 'hit by training cuts'

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By Patsy Payne

A CHARITABLE hospice which gives free treatment to the seriously ill is suffering the knock-on effect of swingeing NHS cutbacks.

As an accredited specialist palliative care unit, St Raphael's, in North Cheam, has regularly offered educational training courses to NHS staff such as district and community nurses and hospital staff.

And until now, an average year's takings for such courses would boost the hospice's much-needed funds by about £18,000.

But now, says the hospice, cuts in NHS training have meant their earnings are down by £13,000 and the courses planned are just two instead of the usual eight.

The hospice, which cares for terminally ill patients from the boroughs of Sutton and Merton, has regularly offered their courses at a very economical cost.

Keith Witham, fundraising and communications director for the hospice, said: "So far this year St Raphael's Hospice has received feed back from about 10 district nurses and community nurses who have all said they would like to attend our courses.

"But have been refused study leave to attend, as well as the cost of the course.

"Last year we ran eight courses, all well attended.

"This year that will be reduced to two courses and a reduced attendance. So we have seen a reduction of over 75 per cent due to lack of NHS funding and staff time for study leave being refused.

"If the local NHS does not invest in training for its staff, that will have a knock on effect far beyond this year or next year.

"It will affect the quality of care for patients.

"And St Raphael's is losing out by over £13,000 a year in lost training course income and the ability to share our special expertise with other health care staff."

Mr Witham added: "It is the view of St Raphael's Hospice that local NHS staff's study leave and facility for paying the cost of day training courses should be reinstated.

"This would help the education of NHS staff in palliative care and assist the hospice in generating that revenue."

Ann Jameson, head of education and development at Sutton and Merton PCT, said no request made by its staff for the palliative care training provided by St Raphael's had been refused.

"We would certainly fund this for district nurses and other relevant members of PCT staff, if they requested it and had their line manager's backing.

But Epsom and St Helier Trust's director of nursing and care standards, Steve Lennox, said they were under financial pressures in relation to staff training and that it could be difficult in "the current financial climate" to fund all requested courses.

However, they did have substantial provision at Kingston University for palliative care training.

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