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DEVELOPING A NEW PSYCHO-ONCOLOGY SERVICE

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Aims: To examine the referrals to a new Psycho-oncology service (one session per week) in a tertiary referral hospital in north Dublin with a Liaison Psychiatry service, and to examine the challenges and benefits of setting up a specialised psychiatry service for patients with a diagnosis of a malignancy.
Methods: Referrals were taken from any member of the multidisciplinary oncology and haematology teams, as well as from other medical or surgical teams involved in providing medical care to this population. The referrals were examined closely, along with the outcome and the follow up advised.
Results: In the first year of the service, 28 patients were referred to the service and 26 (93%) were seen.18 (64%) were referred as consults during the course of an inpatient admission or while attending the oncology day ward; 10 (36%) were referred as out-patients. Overall 57 appointments were scheduled with an 86% attendance rate. Over the year, the number of referrals gradually increased with time as the service became more widely known. The most common psychiatric diagnoses were depression and adjustment disorder, at 21% each. 54% of patients also had input from the Palliative Medicine service.
Conclusions: It became evident from the referrals that there are substantial psychiatric needs in this population, and this need had been previously unmet. As we established a specialist service, the service uptake was initially slow, but as the service became more widely known in the hospital the number of referrals increased.

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