

Hospiscare always
go the extra mile.

Chris, a patient from Exeter

Our history

Hospiscare has been supporting the local community for 30 years and has a story of development fuelled by the support of the community.



Caring since 1982

Hospiscare launched in 1982 with just one nurse and massive support. Initially we cared for terminally ill patients at home in just the Exeter area.

10 years later we opened a 12-bed hospice in Dryden Road, where patients across Exeter, mid and east Devon are cared for. Today we are caring for over 700 patients at any one time. Read more about our amazing story below.

[Hospiscare timeline](#)

Why Hospiscare began

Local need

Hospiscare's pioneers were the then Bishop of Crediton and Revd. Dr John Searle. Dr Searle was a consultant at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, who was stung into action by correspondence in the Times newspaper that advocated euthanasia. He felt that there must be a better way to care for patients with a terminal illness, and realised that something must be done locally.

His first move was to persuade the health authority to commission research on the local situation. The Searle Report of 1980 found that terminally ill patients were not well served by local NHS.

The hospice movement in the UK

Dame Cicely Saunders founded the first modern hospice in London in 1967, establishing the principles of expert pain and symptom control, compassionate care, teaching and clinical research. Before this development, end of life care was not well understood or practised.

Hospiscare's founder, Dr Searle was attending a critically ill patient and was appalled to hear the consultant say: 'Send her home with a bottle of whisky' whilst training at Guy's Hospital, London in the 1950s.

This stark memory became the seed from which Hospiscare grew. Read [Hospiscare's values](#) to see what principles underpin Hospiscare.

Hospiscare timeline

≥1982 - launch

Four hundred people crowded into Exeter's Guildhall when a public appeal was launched for £350k to pay for community based nurses. Jill Pettit was introduced as the first Hospiscare nurse. Initially only people within six miles of the cathedral were served. The health authority gave the new charity £100k, an office and the use of Mowbray Cottage as a base for the nurses.

The 1980s - growth

Further Hospiscare charities were set up in the 1980s in Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth due to community action. They raise funds to pay for Hospiscare nurses in their areas.

1989 - appeal for hospice launched

Hospiscare made a public appeal for £1.6m to build a hospice to provide intensive treatment, doctors and consultants to back up the community nurses.

1992 - the opening of the hospice

In 1992, the Duchess of Kent opened our 12 bed in-patient and daycare unit, built on a corner of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital site, leased at a nominal rent from the health authority. Dr Jim Gilbert was appointed as consultant in palliative medicine. The still unusual clinical policy of offering same day admission for relief of severe symptoms and distress was inaugurated.

Hospiscare community nurses and volunteers now covered Exeter, mid and east Devon. Volunteers were crucial, working with patients and families and as fundraisers. At this time, Hospiscare was run mainly by its trustees and other volunteers. This became impractical and administrative staff were employed and fundraising activities stepped up to keep the expanded services going.

1995 - Hospiscare at the RD&E Hospital

Hospiscare appointed a specialist nurse to work at the RD&E Hospital to visit patients and provide education.

Today the Hospiscare hospital team has three specialist nurses who are a vital link with primary care services and ensure a better experience for Hospiscare patients.

2006 - 2008 expansion of the hospice

In 2006, due to a generous legacy, new visitor accommodation was opened allowing families to stay close to the ward, and the in-patient unit was refurbished and improved.

In a second phase of building using a grant from the Department of Health, our day centre was expanded and a dedicated education suite opened in 2008, as well as refurbishment and expansion of our catering facilities.

2011 - A royal year

In 2010 and 2011, the Mid Devon Appeal ran to open Pine Lodge after a grant from the department of Health. With the target successfully reached, the Tiverton based centre was opened by Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex on 17th October 2011.

This royal opening followed all of the Hospiscare volunteers receiving the Queens Award for Volunteering Services for their work throughout the years.

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