

Case Study: Palliative Care MSc at Cardiff University

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### **Introduction**

This report describes the research results of ‘Palliative Care’, a consultancy team tasked to assess the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of Cardiff University’s (CU) learner support system with a special focus on palliative care. This paper will conduct an exploration case study of the distance education Palliative Care MSc Program (PCP) at Cardiff University to include university and learner characteristics; current teaching and training models utilized; institutional resources to include available learner support; and major challenges and opportunities faced by the institution.

### **Organizational Context and Learner Characteristics**

CU is the largest provider of adult education in Cardiff, United Kingdom (UK) and one of the UK’s leading research universities (Cardiff University, 2015-e). Fiona Rawlinson, the Palliative Care Program Director, states CU’s vision is, “Making Cardiff University education accessible to all: deaf, blind, dyslexic, gay, transgender” (personal communication, November 5, 2015). CU is organized into three colleges: College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; College of Biomedical and Life Sciences; and College of Physical Sciences and Engineering. The Cardiff School of Medicine is included within the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences (Cardiff University, 2015-a).

CU learners derive from over 100 countries worldwide and include a spectrum of multicultural backgrounds lending diversity to CU’s student population. CU is home to over 30,000 undergraduate, graduate, domestic and international students. The Medical School boasts 1600 undergraduate students and 1100 post-graduate medical students (Cardiff University

School of Medicine, 2015). The PCP program averages 75 students yearly and has graduated over 1,000 students since its inception in 1989 (F. Rawlinson, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

### **Teaching and Training Models**

CU is a dual mode institution incorporating face-2-face, online distance, and blended learning education utilizing research-led teaching (Cardiff University, 2015-g). CU offers a full- and part-time distance education Palliative Medicine (MSc) and Palliative Care (PgDip) Program, which was launched in 1989. The students in these programs are registered medical practitioners expanding their knowledge and expertise in caring for patients with non-curable and terminal illness (Cardiff University, 2015-f). The majority of learning in the program is conducted via distance education with minimal requirements for face-to-face participation, ranging from four to seven days total. The PCP aims to craft expert clinicians, who specialize in pediatric or adult palliative care (Cardiff University, 2015-c). The PCP partners with the Korun Shreya Hospital in India. At the beginning of each program class start, UK tutors travel to India to start the semester (F. Rawlinson, personal communication, November 5th, 2015).

The program begins with a mandatory face-to-face contact session of five days, to plan the student's project and ensure students understand research methodology. A second two-day session exists, which is not compulsory, but instead evaluates student progress and provides support for the dissertation (Cardiff University, 2015-c). To complete the diploma, learners take a variety of courses in pain and symptom management; communication skills; ethics and law; and regulatory/administrative aspects of palliative care. To obtain the Master of Science degree, participants are required to complete a dissertation in addition to required core curriculum courses (Cardiff University, 2015-c).

### **Learner Support Services and Institutional Resources**

Distance education students of the Palliative Care Program receive and have access to the following support services:

- CU computing services;
- Library services to include extended library and postal loans; interlibrary loans; and access to electronic information resources;
- Online registration, tuition payment and application processes; and
- Extended remote access service to the university network (Cardiff University, 2015-d).

The Palliative Care Program uses the Blackboard Learning Management System.

Blackboard is an online learning platform offering the following support services:

asynchronous discussions for staff/student interactions, posting recording teaching sessions, tutorials, and mobile apps for specific training purposes (Cardiff University, 2015-d).

Blackboard also has technical support available for users.

Each student receives two levels of support, one from CU and one from PCP including personal tutors for each student, CU and PCP representatives contact students yearly to receive information on student experience, suggestions, and comments; and interactive café asynchronous discussion boards are available for student self- and peer-help, which are moderated to ensure student success.

CU has a vast budget totaling 455.7 million pounds with costs equaling 430.4 million; specifically 253.4 million for staff, 5.1 million for administration, and 25.5 million on other services. (Cardiff University, 2015-b). The PCP budget is based on student enrollment, which is proportionate and changes annually (F. Rawlinson, personal communication, November 5,

2015). In addition to tuition and fees supplied by students, the Palliative Care Program earns revenue through research grants, gifts, and contracts (Cardiff University, 2015-a).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The formation of the PCP allowed medical care providers throughout the UK to increase their knowledge and skills in palliative care. As the world's population ages, palliative care is a necessary facet of medical care creating opportunities for educational institutions around the globe. However, with opportunity comes challenges. Fiona Rawlinson, Palliative Care Program Director, states the existing challenges facing CU is moving locations from the Cancer Research Center at Velindre Hospital to the Cardiff University School of Medicine teaching hospital and restructuring their staff (personal communication, November 5, 2015). Currently, the Palliative Care Program has four administrators, five instructors, and one director. The program is moving to two administrators, seven instructors, and one director. Redistributing work is a challenge as the budget is restricted to student enrollment numbers. Increasing enrollments is another challenge for the PCP. More students would increase the Palliative Care Program budget allowing them to expand their program (F. Rawlinson, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Cardiff University is attempting to assist with the needed training for palliative care providers while reaching a larger audience through their distance education MSc Program. This paper demonstrated the quality education available from the Palliative Care MSc Program at Cardiff University (CU) to include university and learner characteristics such as student diversity; current teaching and training models utilized as a dual mode institution; institutional resources to include available learner support to include library services and access to the

Blackboard Learning Management System; and the major challenges and opportunities to include growth and management changes, faced by the institution.

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