**September is Blood Cancer Awareness Month…..**

At the Hope Centre we have a Multiple Myeloma Support Group who meet monthly (due to the covid-19 pandemic this is currently been facilitated via Zoom meetings). This short article will explain what is Multiple Myeloma? Symptoms of Multiple Myeloma and where you can source further information and advice.

From discussion our support group identified many people have not heard off Multiple Myeloma and wanted to raise awareness on this type of blood cancer. Multiple Myeloma is classified as blood cancer, there are many types of blood cancers such as Leukaemia and Lymphoma’s and they have different symptoms and treatments (Blood Cancer UK 2021). For the purpose of this article we will discuss Multiple Myeloma.

**What is Myeloma?**

Myeloma, also known as Multiple Myeloma, is a cancer arising from plasma cells, a type of white blood cell which is made in the bone marrow. Bone marrow is the ‘spongy’ material found in the centre of the larger bones in the body. The bone marrow is where all blood cells are made.

Plasma cells form part of your immune system. Normal plasma cells produce antibodies, also called immunoglobulins, to help fight infection. In myeloma, these plasma cells become abnormal, multiply uncontrollably and release only one type of antibody – known as paraprotein or M protein (Monoclonal protein) – which has no useful function. It is often through the measurement of this paraprotein/ M protein that myeloma is diagnosed and monitored.

Unlike many cancers, myeloma does not exist as a lump or tumour. Most of the medical problems related to myeloma are caused by the build-up of the abnormal plasma cells in the bone marrow and the presence of the paraprotein in the blood or in the urine.

Myeloma affects multiple places in the body (hence multiple myeloma) where bone marrow is normally active in an adult within the bones of the spine, skull, pelvis, the rib cage, long bones of the arms and legs and the areas around the shoulders and hips. Myeloma is a relapsing-remitting cancer, this means there are periods when the myeloma is causing symptoms and/or complications and needs to be treated, followed by periods of remission or plateau where the myeloma does not cause symptoms and does not require treatment (Myeloma.org.uk / Irish cancer society / NCCP 2021)

**Symptoms of Multiple Myeloma can include:-**

Fatigue (extreme tiredness).

Breathlessness.

Bone pain.

Recurring infections

Nausea (feeling sick)

As with **any new symptoms or medical concerns** **please consult your GP** so you can discuss this further.

**Further Supports and Resources**

There are many supports and resources available for anyone requiring further information, these include:-

Patient information packs which patients receive this when they are first diagnosed with multiple myeloma. The pack focuses on what you need to know following your diagnosis and provides some practical tips for the weeks and months ahead. Family members and friends may also find it useful to read.

Clinical Nurse Specialists work as part of a multidisciplinary team with Consultant Haematologists and are specialised nurses trained to provide support to patients and their families from the time of diagnosis and through out there treatment journey

Psychologists They are available in some hospitals and provide psychological care to help you cope during your treatment journey

Social workers who can provide support and advice on benefits and entitlements and can help to link you with “Care to drive” a facility free to some patients who have transport difficulties when needing to attend hospital appointments for treatments.

Hope Centre provides emotional support to people affected by cancer including those who care for them, from the time of diagnosis, throughout treatment and afterwards, ensuring a confidential, professional and caring service in a peaceful environment.

There are many information booklets such as “understanding Myeloma” provided by the Irish cancer society which provide information on treatment, physical, psychological and social aspect of Multiple Myeloma.

Here at the Hope Centre new members are always welcome to the monthly Support Group meeting for clients diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma and we hope to be able to bring the group meetings back to the Hope Centre later this autumn. Clients say having the opportunity to talk with other group members at the facilitated led group about their experiences can be of huge value to them alongside having the opportunity to chat to other members over a cup of tea, offering peer support in a relaxed, comfortable space really helps them.

The group meetingss are held on the 1st Friday’s of the month from 10.30am-12pm, please contact the Hope Centre on 0539238555 if you would like to join.