



Aspirant Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) Development Programme

Six Month Evaluation - April 2024

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Intended Audience: EMCA Trusts Lead Cancer Nurses and Deputies EMCA, ICS Cancer Boards, NHS Health Education England		

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Background

Lead Cancer Nurses (LCNs) within the East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) region have shared concerns regarding difficulties surrounding recruitment into vacant cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) posts, as highlighted in pre and post-pandemic reports including Macmillan's *Cancer Workforce in England* census (2017), *Addressing the Gap* (2020) and *Cancer Nursing on the Line* (2021). With an already stretched workforce (some of whom were approaching retirement), the need to develop and nurture local ambition, equipping registered nurses interested in cancer CNS posts, evolved into the idea of a development programme.

The intention of the programme was that participants (knowns as 'Aspirants') would access training, education, and local experiential learning, to enhance their skills enabling them to apply for cancer CNS roles as they arose. Having struggled to shortlist applicants for posts in the past, the desire to 'Grow our Own' laid the foundation for the **EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Specialist Development Programme**, which was officially launched 9th October 2023.

Setting the Scene

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) footprint spans a 5.2million population and supports eight Secondary Care Trusts across five separate Integrated Care Systems (ICS) providing cancer treatment to patients covering multiple tumour sites and is committed to the development of the cancer CNS workforce. Cancer CNSs are a key resource within our Alliance in supporting people affected by cancer; as well as leading service developments that improve cancer care.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the number of people living with a cancer diagnosis is set to double from more than 2 million in 2021 to 4 million in 2030. To support people affected by Cancer, the specialist cancer workforce currently needs an additional 2,500 specialist cancer nurses, an increase of 84%. By 2030, the gap between patient need and workforce capacity will have grown to 3,700 nurses, an increase of 123%.

Overview of the programme

Expanding on the ideas of the EMCA LCNs and other stakeholders, a gap analysis was produced by the Programme Lead and shared with the forum. Once a consensus of what should be included was reached, separate feedback forums for Aspirants (those who may be considering a career as a cancer CNS) and Coaches (experienced professionals already working a cancer CNS post) were created.

Working collaboratively with Volute (a design company with vast experience of working with the NHS) and the feedback forums, to develop an online learning management system (LMS)), the stakeholder group designed a structured approach to modules essential in caring for a person affected by cancer.

Designed to offer registered nursing staff an *introduction* to the role of a cancer CNS, Learners (here known as 'Aspirants') are encouraged to set up their own private learning account. The Programme offers free, asynchronous learning that can be accessed conveniently at a time and location to suit, using a personal computer or tablet/mobile

phone, directing Aspirants through readily available, high-quality resources that are interactive and informative, covering the following sections:

- Welcome and Introduction
 - Background
 - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
 - NHS Long Term Plan
 - The NHS Workforce Plan
 - ACCEND Programme
- Clinical Practice and Scope of Role
 - The role of the cancer CNS
 - Patient Advocacy
 - MDT Working
 - Safeguarding
 - Communication
 - Governance: Data security and information sharing
 - Research and evidence-based practice
 - Level 2 Psychology
 - Leadership
- Cancer
 - Biological basis of cancer: the cell and cell cycle
 - Screening and prevention
 - Diagnosis
 - Staging and grading
 - Genomics
- Intervention
 - Surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy
 - Hormone therapy, Targeted Cancer Therapies, Immunotherapy and Topical anti-cancer agents
 - Impact of cancer therapies
 - Supportive and Palliative Care
- Personalised Care and Support Interventions
 - Personalised Stratified Follow Up (PSFU)
 - End of Treatment Summaries
 - Cancer Care Review
 - Health and Wellbeing Support
- Clinical Supervision

Learning does not require facilitation and is non-linear so can be tailored to the individuals' needs, whilst also offering consolidation of learning through simple quizzes.

Feedback is collated through feedback forms before and after participation in the Programme and we are very proud to share that the programme has been **accredited** by The Continued Professional Development (CPD) Certification Service, the logo for which is

included on the Certificate Aspirants receive demonstrating 20 CPD points for their completion of the programme.

Aspirants are provided with a branded template for reflective writing adapted from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) forms to be used in their Revalidation and professional portfolios.

The Programme complies with the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations (2018), ensuring that it meets the needs of neuro-divergent learners and is situated on the EMCA website, transforming services, workforce tab, the Programme can be accessed easily. Access is also easy via the QR code or the unique URL address: [EMCA Aspirant CNS Development Programme](#); without the need to request logins. See below:

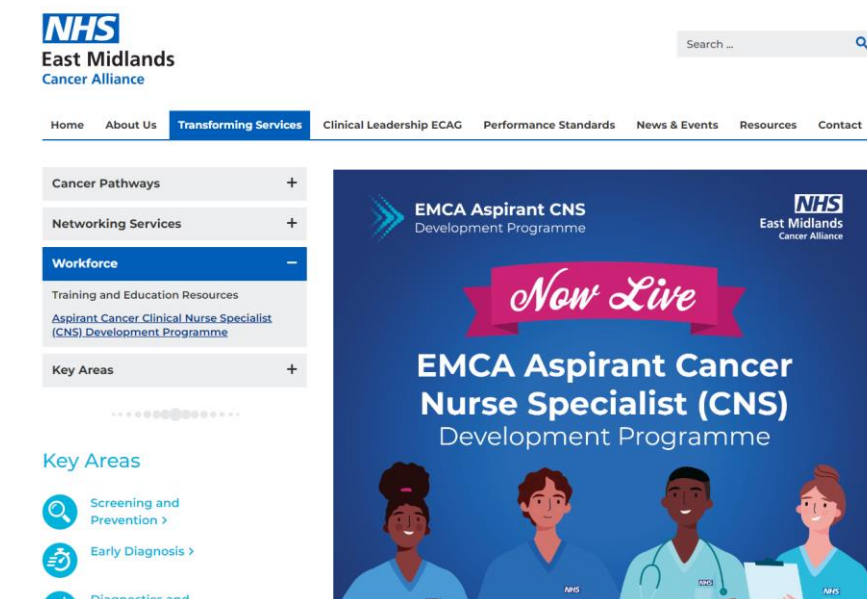


Image 1: screen shot of Programme on EMCA website

Developed from autumn 2022, prior to the NHS Health Education England's Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development programme (ACCEND), the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme was officially launched on 9th October 2023. Not only will the programme increase the number of CNSs trained to provide expert specialist support for every person living with and beyond cancer, it will also boost staff morale, enhance recruitment and improve retention.

[NHS Health Education England's Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development programme \(ACCEND\)](#)

Aspirants are directed to the ACCEND Programme and advised to familiarise themselves with this, as this will likely be implemented within their Trusts. In addition to the current offering for the 'supportive and assistive' workforce, there will also be additional eLearning opportunities available for '*registered, enhanced towards advanced*' (RETA) staff in the future. The feedback so far has been that the EMCA programme links in well with the aspirations for the ACCEND Programme.

Qualitative feedback

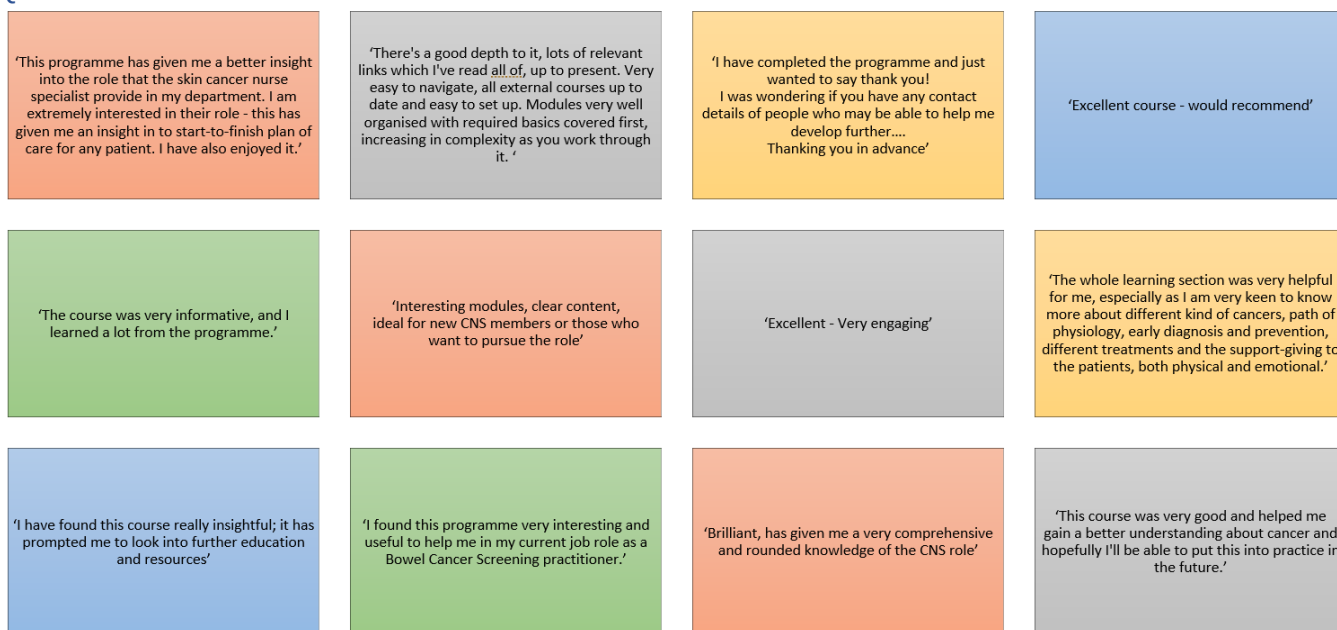


Image 2: qualitative feedback

As shown above, some of the feedback from Aspirants so far has included:

- 'Excellent - Very engaging'
- 'Excellent course - would recommend'
- 'There's a good depth to it, lots of relevant links which I've read all of, up to present. Very easy to navigate, all external courses up to date and easy to set up. Modules very well organised with required basics covered first, increasing in complexity as you work through it.'
- 'The course was very informative, and I learned a lot from the programme.'
- 'Brilliant, has given me a very comprehensive and rounded knowledge of the CNS role'
- 'I have found this course really insightful; it has prompted me to look into further education and resources'
- 'This programme has given me a better insight into the role that the skin cancer nurse specialist provide in my department. I am extremely interested in their role - this has given me an insight in to start-to-finish plan of care for any patient. I have also enjoyed it.'
- 'The whole learning section was very helpful for me, especially as I am very keen to know more about different kind of cancers, path of physiology, early diagnosis and prevention, different treatments and the support-giving to the patients, both physical and emotional.'
- 'I found this programme very interesting and useful to help me in my current job role as a Bowel Cancer Screening practitioner.'
- 'I have completed the programme and just wanted to say thank you!
I was wondering if you have any contact details of people who may be able to help me develop further.... Thanking you in advance'

- 'The course was very informative, and I learned a lot from the programme.'
- 'Interesting modules, clear content, ideal for new CNS members or those who want to pursue the role'

There has also been significant interest from other Cancer Alliances, including Wessex Cancer Alliance, who have asked to roll out the EMCA Programme to their workforce.

Metrics

EMCA Aspirant CNS Development Programme		 East Midlands Cancer Alliance
Programme launched: 9 October 2023		
Metrics: 9.10.23-11.4.24		Since Launch
Total number of visitors to site		1791
Total number of views		12,350
Page views per visit		6.90
Number of people accessing the Aspirant Nurse Programme (new account set ups)		260
Completed Pre-Course Evaluation Forms		138
Completed Post-Course Evaluation Forms		42
Average time on site		1.22

Image 3: Snippet of metrics 9.10.23-11.4.24

The above snippet demonstrates the metrics by which the Programme is being evaluated, including the number of visitors to site and views, learning accounts set up and evaluation forms completed (pre and post course). The data received also enables us to drill down to the demographics of those accessing the Programme, showing that it is reaching the target audience we hoped to engage with, initially band 5 registered nurses (as shown below); but with a bonus of reaching additional roles and bands.

Aspirant Demographics by evaluation form (Online Programme)

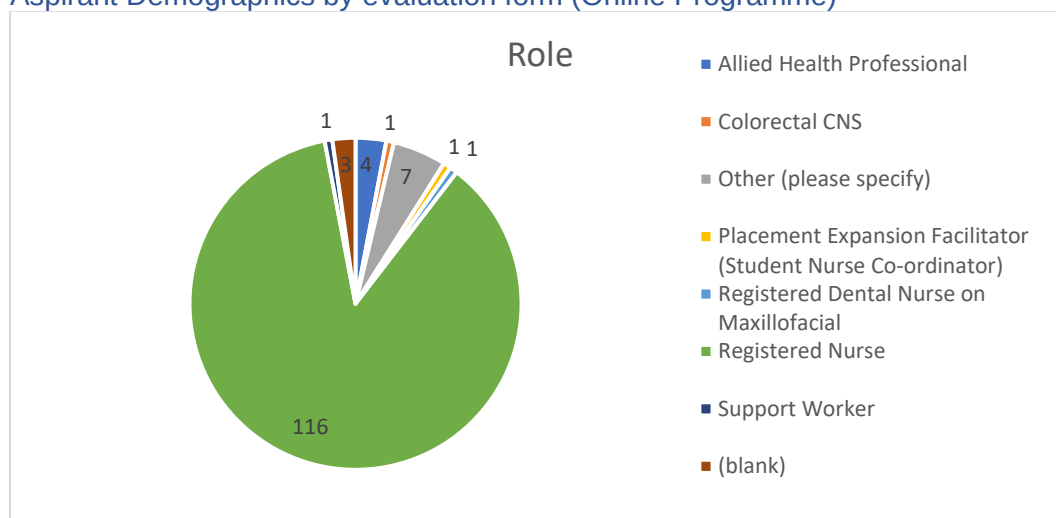


Image 4: Aspirant by Job Role

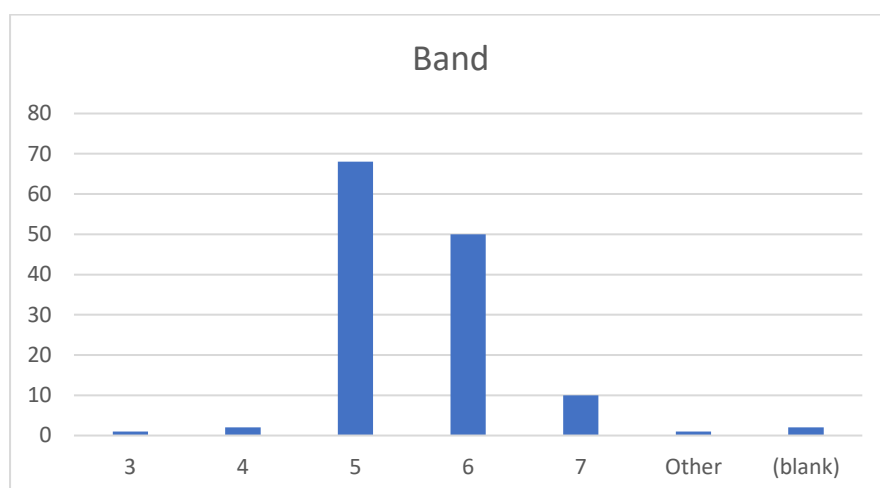
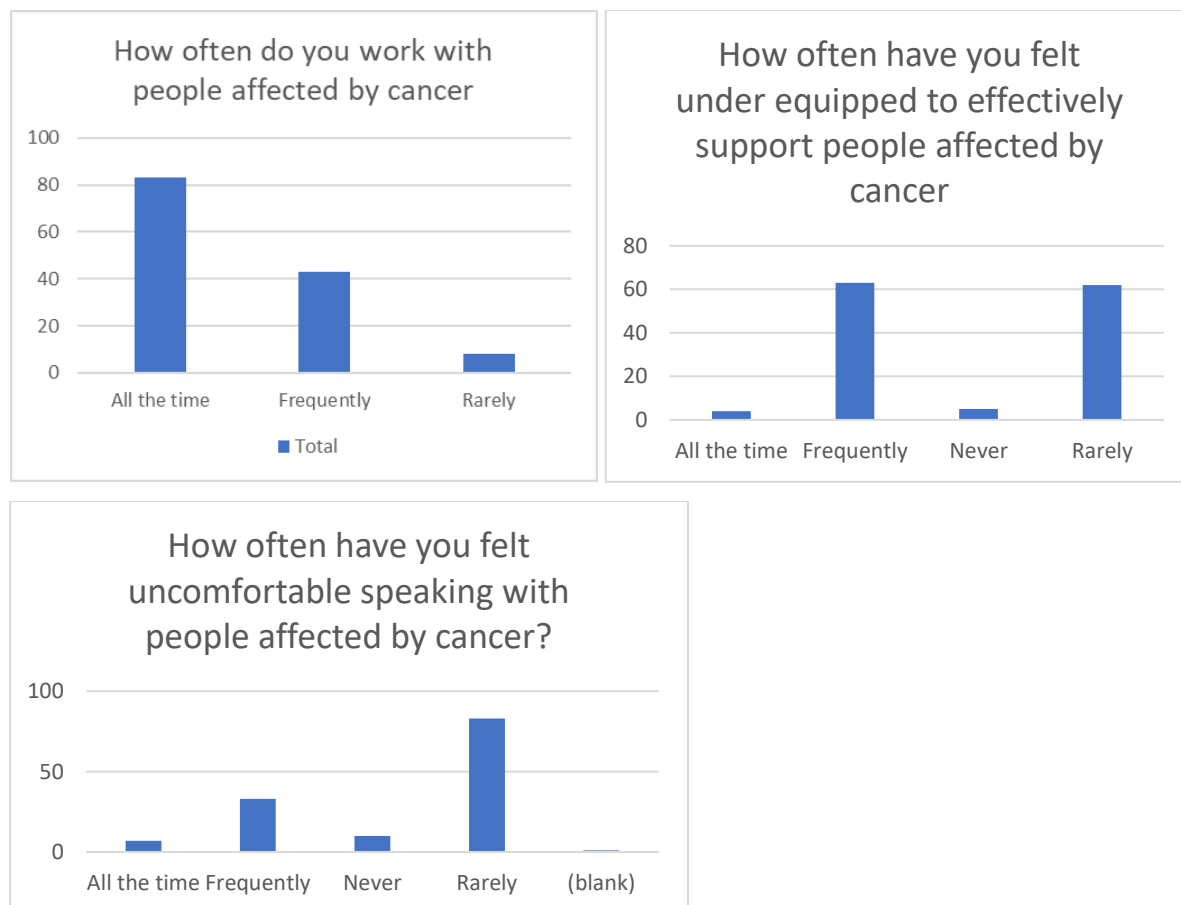


Image 5: Aspirant by Agenda for Change pay band

Pre-Course (Online) Evaluation

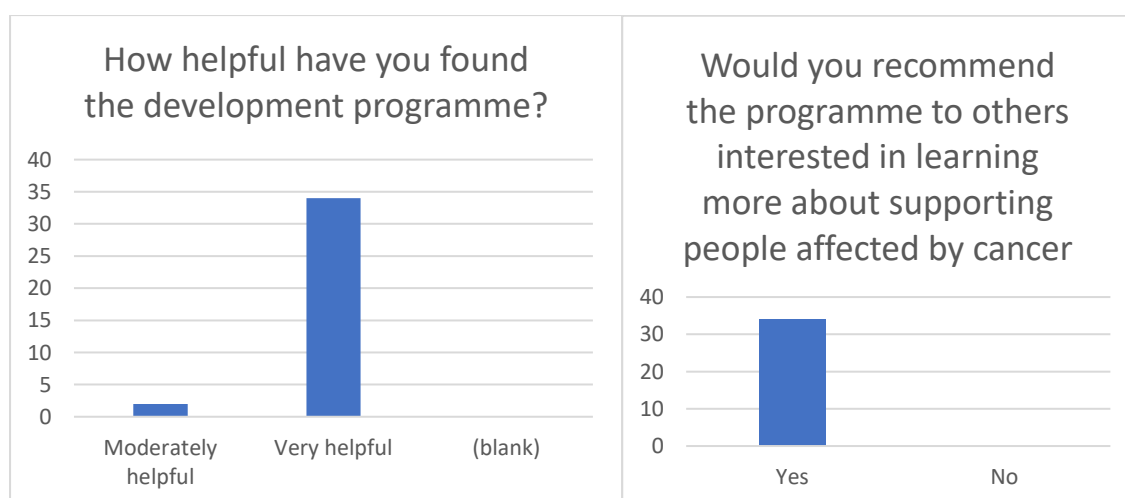
Completion of the pre-course Evaluation form captured how often Aspirants worked with people affected by cancer, how often they have felt under-equipped to do so and how often they felt uncomfortable speaking with people in the cancer trajectory (amongst other questions including Trust Names). This approach gave a baseline for assessing how they felt they had benefitted from the programme, having later completed the post-course valuation form. The graphics below indicate that most of the Aspirants already work with people affected by cancer either *all the time* or *frequently*, with equal numbers feeling under equipped either *frequently* or *rarely*.



Images 6, 7 and 8: Aspirant responses

Post-Course (Online) Evaluation

To offer a comparison, Aspirants were required to complete a form after completing the online programme. Responses demonstrate that Aspirants found the programme either *moderately helpful* (2 respondents) or *very helpful* (34 respondents); and that when asked if they would recommend the programme to others, all confirmed that they would.



Images 9 and 10: Aspirant responses

Initially Aspirants were asked to rate how 'confident' they felt speaking with people affected by cancer, after completing the programme; however, the terminology was amended to replace the word 'confident' with 'competent' following discussion amongst the LCNs working group. Responses to both are shown in *Image 11*, which shows that 18 respondents confirmed that they felt either very comfortable or competent (12+6), with a further 17 feeling moderately confident or competent (12+5) and only 2 feeling either somewhat competent or not competent at all (1+1).

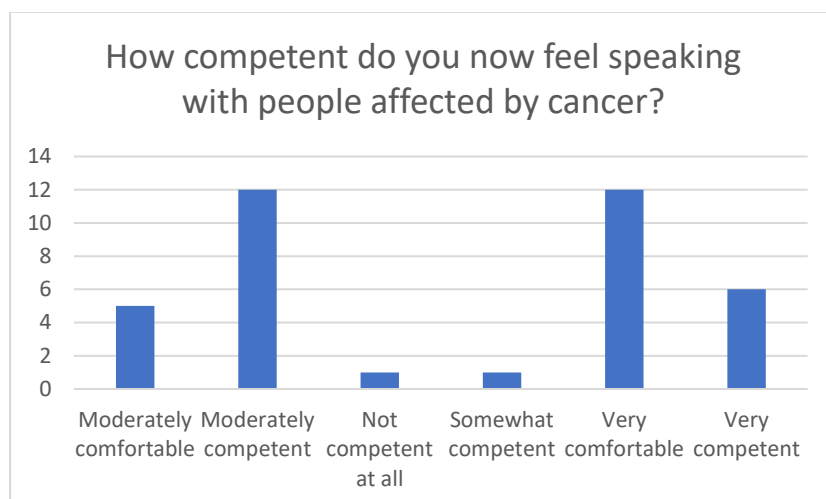


Image 11: Aspirant responses

When asked if Aspirants felt the programme has improved their knowledge of cancer and related topics, 100% of respondents replied yes; and when asked if they were now more likely to consider applying for a job as a cancer CNS in the future, if a vacancy arose, whilst 5 people were unsure, the vast majority (29) confirmed that they would (*Image 12*). This is suggestive of having achieved the overall aim of attracting more registered nurses to the role of cancer CNS.

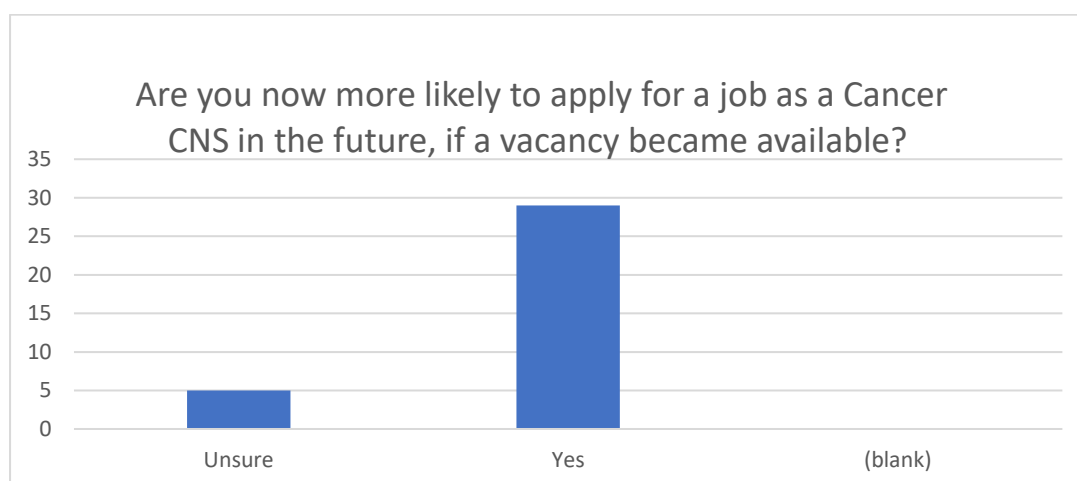


Image 12: Aspirant responses

Experiential learning

The EMCA Lead Cancer Nurses expressed a desire to offer local experiential learning to those who have completed the Programme and wish to gain further insight and experience withing their Trust. Whilst the availability differs between Trusts, the contact details for all EMCA Lead Cancer Nurses are available within the Programme and Aspirants are encouraged to make contact to discuss further. Evaluation forms for before and after any experiential learning, have also been developed and agreed by the group, to evaluate this element of development. Published on the online programme under the 'Experiential Learning' section, Aspirants will be encouraged by facilitating LCNs, to complete before and after they undertake any form of experiential learning. Once an Aspirant has completed an element of experiential learning, they are asked to complete the post-experiential learning evaluation form, after which an additional certificate will be available.

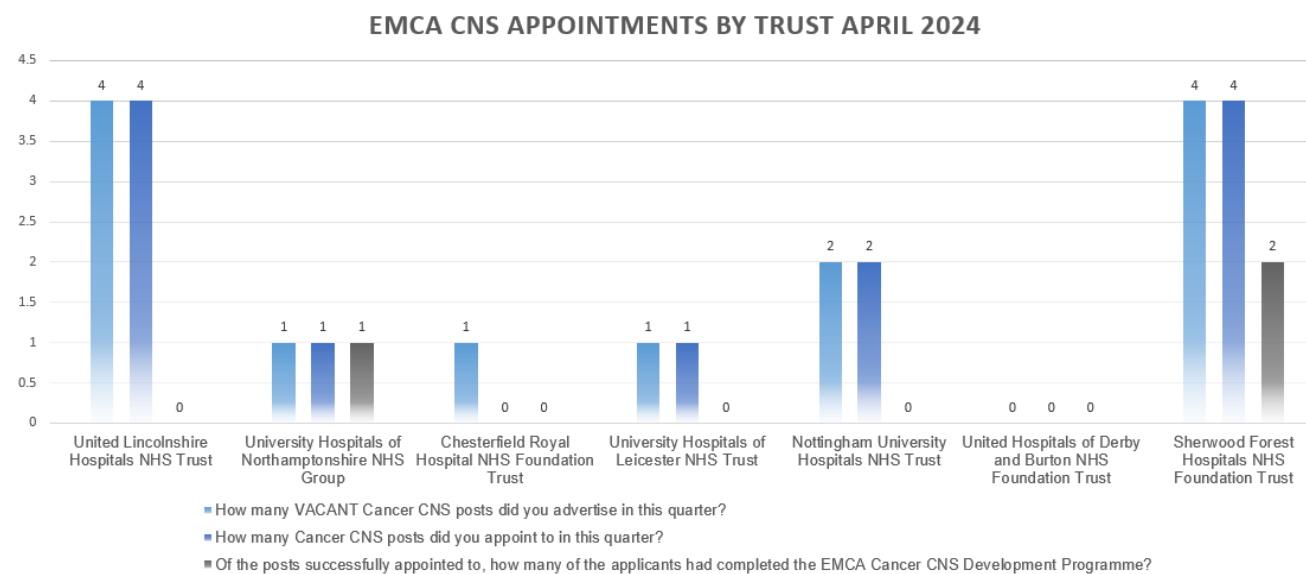
NB: There are none available to report at this time as this is yet to commence; however, they will be included in future reports as required.

Appointment to cancer CNS Posts

The number of Aspirants who have completed the programme and been successfully appointed to a cancer CNS post, will be collated (where possible) on a bi-annual basis by the Lead Cancer Nurses and the Programme Lead, via questionnaire. This will detail how many posts were advertised during the period and roughly how many appointed had completed the EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Development Programme.

The EMCA LCNs have completed the following information as a baseline, which details information by Trust including number of vacancies, appointments and the number of successful candidates who had completed the Programme.

NB: The management and recruitment of CNSs varies throughout the NHS and is often overseen by the CNS Team Lead, Matron or LCN; therefore, this information is useful but not exhaustive.



Conclusion

Since launching on 9th October 2023, the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme has attracted large numbers of visitors to site, views, and subsequent engagement through the setting up of learning accounts, by which Aspirants can demonstrate 20 CPD accredited learning hours relating to cancer and the support of those affected by it. This easily accessed, online programme provides a concise, structured curriculum accessing high quality teaching modules designed to equip registered nurses and offer an introduction to the role of CNS within the cancer workforce.

Data demonstrates that the aim of attracting Band 5 registered nurses, has been achieved with a wide range of additional bands and other allied healthcare roles (including dental nurses, support workers) also completing the programme. Of the data gathered through the LCNs, 12 of the 13 vacant CNS Posts filled within the last quarter, included three Aspirants who had completed the Programme launched only six months ago.

There is evidence that several individuals already working as a CNS (or nurse) within the cancer workforce have found it beneficial to enhance their existing knowledge and skillset.

We are pleased to share that other Cancer Alliances, including Wessex CA will be sharing the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme with their workforce.

The Programme could be further developed to cater for clinical and non-clinical staff in Primary Care settings, as well as other roles including AHPs such as Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Dieticians, for example.

Bibliography

[Cancer Workforce in England 2017 report \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#)

[addressing-the-gap-report \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#)

[Cancer Workforce Plan phase 1 - Delivering the cancer strategy to 2021.pdf \(hee.nhs.uk\)](#)

Macmillan Cancer Support (2021b) *Cancer Nursing on the Line*. Available at: [Forgotten-C-Nursing-Report tcm9-360416.pdf \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#). (Accessed 2 April 2024).