

**Media release
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Major Newcastle employer tackles cancer conversations with help from local charity

STAFF at one Newcastle company are learning first-hand how to support colleagues impacted by cancer, this World Cancer Day (February 4).

In a specialist training session delivered by Maggie's Cancer Care Centre at the Freeman Hospital, some of the team from marine insurance company North P&I Club will learn from experts how to help colleagues with knowledge, empathy and understanding.

And for North's Rebecca Griffin, the training couldn't be more valuable.

The HR business partner, based at North's global headquarters in Newcastle, was diagnosed with thyroid cancer three years ago.

She said: "A cancer diagnosis is emotionally devastating so it's important to have support from people around you.

"Just the word cancer strikes fear into everyone, and it's not easy to know what to say and how to support you. It's difficult even when people have good intentions.

"My colleagues at North have been great, and I know this session will give them the knowledge and confidence not only to help me, but others like me who are living with cancer or have family and friends impacted by it."

There are around 900,000 people of working age living with cancer in the UK. That number is expected to increase to 1.1 million by 2030.

This session will be led by Maggie's Newcastle Centre Head Karen Verrill, who has previously delivered training to big local employers such as Amazon and Newcastle University.

North's team will be given the skills and confidence to talk about cancer and help signpost colleagues to resources such as the Maggie's Centre drop-in service where anyone affected by the disease – including family and friends – can speak to experts.

Karen Verrill, Maggie's Centre Head, said: "'We're so grateful to everyone at North P&I for supporting Maggie's.

"Every week 300 people visit our cancer centre for expert help and advice.

"It's only thanks to the brilliant businesses and individuals who donate and raise funds that we're here for people with cancer when they need us the most.

"Everything at Maggie's is funded by our local community – from our beautiful building and gardens to our small team of nurses, psychologists and benefits advisors.

"One of the things that makes us unique is our daily drop-in. You don't need an appointment or a referral. You can just simply walk-in and speak with our cancer support specialists about any area of

your life that cancer affects. This could be questions about treatments, side effects, money worries or emotional support.

“We also have a weekly programme of support groups, courses and workshops such as Cancer in the Workplace – our training session for managers, HR professionals and wellbeing reps.

“We know a positive return to work can play a significant role in recovery from cancer. Our workshops educate and up-skill employers on how best to support their employees with knowledge, empathy and understanding. They’re free to attend and have already been popular with big employers in our region.”

Rebecca added: “I had the pleasure of visiting Maggie’s around three years ago to attend one of their cancer in the workplace sessions. It was tremendously informative – helping us to consider what’s important to those returning to work after a cancer diagnosis and treatment, facilitating lots of useful discussion.

“From a personal perspective it was timely as the session came just a few days after my own diagnosis of thyroid cancer.

“The diagnosis was quite a shock and I was finding the amount of information available quite overwhelming to work through. I was fortunate enough to have a private chat with one of the fabulous Maggie’s employees after the workplace session, the compassion I was shown was very welcome, as was the chance to really talk openly to a third party without worrying about how they were taking the news as you do with family and friends. While it was an emotional chat (with plenty of tears) I left feeling listened to, more prepared for what was ahead and comforted.

“I can really see the benefits of a haven away from the sterile, clinical treatment environments, Maggie’s provides a safe space and a place for education and collaboration. It’s a real gem for the North East.”

North has donated £30,000 to Maggie’s since 2016, including taking part in Maggie’s fundraising campaign to sponsor a day’s running costs.

The Centre – which is a registered charity – has been hailed by many cancer patients and their families and friends as a fantastic resource, offering expert advice and resources in a relaxing space away from clinical environments.

The team at Maggie’s Newcastle includes three nurses, a benefits advisor and two psychologists. They provide support and a space for people to talk about anything ranging from their diagnosis and treatment, through to the physical and emotional impact and practical considerations, such as financial support if they have to stop work.

Pre-pandemic the Centre would typically welcome 100 people a day, and numbers are starting to increase again.

Businesses can sponsor a day at Maggie’s for £2,400. To find out more, visit the Maggie’s website: <https://www.maggies.org/get-involved/get-your-company-involved/>

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