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**Exploring the relationship between volunteering and hospice sustainability  
in the UK: A theoretical model**

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## **Background**

Hospices in the UK face a significant increase in demand for their services in the future as a result of an aging population (Calanzani et al, 2013). Calanzani et al, indicate that by 2023 deaths from cancer will have risen by 30% for men and 12% for women, and that organisations must consider how to increase or reconfigure services to meet this growing need. This is also set within a challenging economic context. With demand for services increasing, income must also rise in line with demands. Evidence shows that for two thirds of hospices statutory funding has either fallen or remained static during 2014-2015 (Hospice UK and Together for Short Lives, 2015). A survey of children's palliative care funding and commissioning in England identified a reduction of around 4% in state funding compared to a rise of 9.7% in the cost of care provided. (Together for Short Lives, 2016). With an average of 30% of statutory funding for adult hospices and 10% for children's services, hospices depend increasingly on charitable sources to maintain and develop services (Hospice UK and Together for Short Lives, 2015).

Morris et al (2013) consider that a growing demand for services has implications, not only for funding, but also for the recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff and volunteers. Volunteers undoubtedly play an important part in the delivery of palliative care, (Morris et al, 2015; Morris et al, 2013; Davis-Smith, 2004). In recent years volunteering has been promoted as essential in enabling hospices to address the growing demand for services (Help the Hospices, 2012). However, the nature of volunteering is also shifting as a result of societal and demographic changes (Guild et al, 2014). Historically, hospice volunteers were recruited to roles with an expectation that they would give a long term regular commitment. However, Guild et al suggest that it is no longer feasible to rely on this approach. Volunteers

today have less time to offer and expect that their skills will be used in a meaningful way. Organisations need to consider innovative and flexible approaches that embrace these changing volunteer expectations (Guild et al, 2014). Hospices can no longer assume that volunteering will continue in the future in the same way as it has in the past.

Evidence indicates that volunteering is inextricably linked to the future sustainability of services (Naylor et al, 2013; Handy and Mook, 2010; Guirguis-Younger et al, 2005). Coupled with a suggestion that current hospice economic models may be unsustainable because of increasing demand for services and lack of secure funding (Theodosopoulos, 2011), volunteers must be considered as part of the strategic planning process if organisations are to respond effectively to future challenges. In their study of volunteering in health and social care, Naylor et al.(2013) consider that thinking strategically about volunteering not only raises the profile and importance of volunteering but also enables organisations to be explicit about how volunteers can help in meeting organisational goals. Therefore, the role of volunteering as an organisational resource and its relationship to organisational sustainability must be better understood. However, there is a limited research focused specifically on this aspect of volunteering.

This paper describes the development of a theoretical model which provides a new conceptualised framework within which to consider and review the influence of volunteering on organisational sustainability. This theoretical model was informed by the findings from a narrative review of the literature.

## **Aims**

This literature review formed part of a doctoral study exploring the relationship between volunteers and voluntary hospice sustainability, which included the development and testing of the theoretical model in practice. The review explored recent literature on volunteering in hospice and palliative care within the context of organisational sustainability, impact and value. The review also highlighted factors that influence volunteering at national, local and organisation levels with a view to considering the resulting impact on hospices.

The results of the literature review informed the development of a theoretical model demonstrating these impacts and influences, that provides hospices with a framework with which to review their organisation within the context of the model.

## **Method**

### *Data Sources*

The following databases were searched: CINHAL (EBSCO), British Nursing Index, Intute: Health and Life Sciences, ERIC, SCOPUS, ASSIA (CSA) Cochrane Library and Google Scholar. In addition, government websites from the four countries of the UK were searched for palliative care and volunteering policy documents. The Institute of Volunteering Evidence bank was also searched for relevant papers. National Palliative Care organisation websites were also searched for reports.

A search strategy was developed based on an initial review of relevant literature and the research question. The search terms used and the combinations used are shown in Table 1.

< Insert Table 1 Search terms >

Using the snowball technique, references from identified papers were also screened to find additional papers that did not appear during the original literature search.

#### *Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria*

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are shown in Table 2.

< Insert Table 2 Inclusion Criteria >

#### *Screening and extraction of data*

Titles and abstracts selected for inclusion were recorded using a bibliographic management tool. All titles and abstracts retrieved were initially screened against the inclusion criteria for relevance. This was followed by a full text review of papers identified for inclusion. A table for the analysis of selected papers was developed to include the country, methodology used, sample size and relevant data extracted. Articles were analysed critically by the lead researcher and were independently checked by the other two members of the team. During the analysis of literature emerging themes were identified and recorded and are reported under results.

## **Results**

Of the 90 documents selected for inclusion, only 29 were research papers. Due to the dearth of related research during this period, 61 discursive papers, books, government documents and policy papers were included to gain a policy, practice and theoretical overview.

The analysis of findings presented in this paper are grouped under four key themes that emerged from the literature:

- 1) Organisational sustainability factors;
- 2) Volunteering influences on hospices;
- 3) Organisational influences affecting volunteering;
- 4) External influences affecting hospices and volunteering.

The relationship between the themes and how these influenced the development of the theoretical model are discussed in the sections that follow.

### **Theme 1 Organisational sustainability factors**

According to the Chartered Quality Institute (nd) the Model of a Sustainable Organisation has five key component areas: (i) 'customers' without which the organisation would not exist, (ii) systems and processes that enable products or services to be produced and delivered, (iii) people, culture, leadership and management which affect the organisation and how it works, (iv) the wider societal context and (v) the environment. In the context of non-profit

organisational effectiveness, Herman and Renz (2008) identify key elements of sustainability as effective governance and leadership from the board, management practices, and stakeholder involvement that includes volunteers.

In the case of charity sustainability, Maddocks (2011) suggests that there is risk in ignoring non-financial elements of performance and how these affect current and future sustainability. Miller et al (2011) consider that there are a number of components of sustainability including a clear vision for the future; empowered staff; evaluation of progress and impact; capacity building and an ability to respond to change.

The literature also indicates that volunteers play an important role in hospice sustainability, and that hospices are dependent on them to deliver the range and quality of services (Morris et al, 2013; Davis-Smith, 2004). Addington-Hall and Karlsen (2005) while highlighting the relationship between volunteering and sustainability, are clear that hospices must take account of volunteer opinions on key issues as they may reflect the views of the public. They argue that risks to funding and volunteering may be significant if volunteers do not understand or support developments in hospice care.

Others go further in proposing that health and social care organisations must begin to consider volunteering from a strategic perspective if they are to be in a position to meet their goals in the future (Naylor et al, 2013). In a related study by the first author of this paper a number of respondents including senior staff and trustees stated that their hospices would close without the involvement of volunteers (Scott, 2015).



## **Theme 2 Volunteering influences on hospices**

This theme highlighted the influence that volunteering has on the elements of organisational sustainability as identified in theme 1. Four sub-themes related to volunteering influences emerged: governance and leadership, contribution to hospice economy, volunteer impact on workforce skills and quality of services, and public and community support.

### *Governance and leadership*

Volunteers play an important role in the governance and leadership of hospices (Turner and Payne, 2009) and all UK voluntary hospices are governed by volunteers in their role as trustees. Trustees carry considerable legal and strategic responsibility for ensuring that organisations are effectively led, legal and regulatory requirements are fulfilled and that resources are used safely and effectively (Turner and Payne, 2009). According to work undertaken by the Commission into the Future of Hospice Care volunteers play a key role in hospice strategy, enabling services to increase their influence and scope (Help the Hospices, 2012). It follows that volunteer trustees have significant influence on the success or failure of hospice organisations. Therefore, it is of concern that Turner and Payne (2009) found a lack of diversity among UK hospice trustees along with variable approaches to recruitment and some resistance to change. They also identified that some trustees were ill equipped to deal with the rapidly changing context of hospice care. This has significant implications for the future sustainability of hospices given the role of trustees in governance and leadership, and in determining the future strategic direction of hospices.

### *Contribution to hospice economy*

Handy and Mook (2010) consider that volunteering is a vital economic resource to the voluntary sector but that this is not always recognized by organisations. Wilson et al (2005) propose that volunteers are key to the economic stability of organisations, through raising funds and providing additional cost effective services. Indeed, Help the Hospices (2006) concluded that hospice costs would increase by 23% if hospices had to pay for work undertaken by volunteers. In attempting to quantify the economic value of hospice volunteering Gaskin (2003) found that in the UK approximately 90,000 hospice volunteers donated in excess of 18 million hours with an economic value of approximately £133 million, with only £16.7 million invested in supporting and managing this resource. Scott (2015) suggests that currently these figures may have increased to approximately 160,000 volunteers, donating 23 million hours with an estimated economic value of £150 million.

The literature indicates that volunteering brings economic benefits to hospices. If the role of volunteers in raising awareness, fundraising and hospice retail is also considered, their contribution is significant. With income levels at best static or at worst falling (Hospice UK and Together for Short Lives, 2015), income generation from other sources will be essential in the future if organisations are to survive. The role of volunteers in contributing to the hospice economy, therefore, will become even more important in the future.

### *Volunteer impact on workforce skills and quality of services*

Volunteers greatly enhance the role of paid staff and improve the patient experience as well as making an important contribution to patient and family wellbeing and quality of life (Naylor et al, 2013). Further, Gurgius-Younger et al (2005) argue that as health care professionals have moved to a more medical model of care, volunteers have an important role to play in bridging the gap between patients and the clinical team. They consider that volunteers bring a unique, personal and human approach in reaching out to those at end of life in increasingly medicalised environments. This is supported by Claxton-Oldfield (2014) who also states that volunteers offer families respite from caring and have an important advocacy role as a link between patients, families and the professional team. Woitha et al (2015) suggest that volunteer support is focused on the individual practical, social and spiritual needs of the patient and complements professional and informal family care. Goossenssen et al (2016) advocate that volunteering has a unique position, identity and value, working closely alongside both professionals and family carers. They recommend that volunteers in care are seen in a social context where the emphasis is on meaningful engagement and relationships with the patient and family and on meeting each other on a holistic and human level.

The literature indicates that volunteers make a significant contribution to the services delivered by hospices. Volunteers can add to the quality of services; improve the patient and family experience; and can personalise and “demedicalise” the care environment by extending and enhancing the skills of, and care provided by, professionals and family care givers;

*Public and community support*

Addington-Hall and Karlsen (2005) highlight that public support is essential to the future of hospices and that without the support of local communities in volunteering and fundraising many would no longer exist. Volunteers play a pivotal role in promoting hospice and palliative care to the general public (Morris et al, 2015) and are key to services building strong links with their communities (Naylor et al, 2013; Draper et al, 2014). Others consider that volunteers enable services to be more flexible and responsive to local need (Draper et al, 2014), making services more accessible by helping to reduce the fear and taboos around hospice care (Scott, 2015).

However, Morris et al (2015) caution that volunteering engagement with the community is limited because of lack of diversity, historic models of volunteer involvement and volunteers' resistance to change. They propose that hospices have more to do in order to develop engagement with their local communities.

Evidence emerging from this literature review suggests that a key factor in hospice sustainability is the relationship with the local community. Hospices depend on their community both for income and volunteers. Volunteers may also help to reduce barriers to hospice care, however there is clearly more to do in developing community engagement and diversifying volunteering.

### **Theme 3 Organisational influences affecting volunteering**

Organisational structures and management can have a significant influence on volunteering

and must take account of volunteer needs and aspirations (Guriguis-Younger and Grafanaki, 2008).

Staff are often gatekeepers to volunteering, setting boundaries on activities and managing sharing of information. Any concerns that they may have about volunteers may result in barriers to volunteering, especially in care-focused roles (Scott, 2014). Scott (2014) states that it is important that staff have a clear understanding of the role and boundaries of volunteering and their responsibilities in support and management.

Many current volunteer management practices are drawn from business models (Rochester et al, 2010). They describe the 'dominant paradigm' as one where organisations involve volunteers for the purpose of delivering a service to others. Traditional hospice volunteering models fall into this category with volunteers being formally managed by paid staff through hierarchical structures. This model may be unsustainable as volunteer expectations are changing and they demand more from their experience with organisations (Guild et al, 2014; Rochester et al, 2010; Davis-Smith 2004).

Hospices must diversify roles and attract new people, reduce bureaucracy and invest in management and support (Davis-Smith, 2004). This is further supported by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering (2008) which challenges organisations to modernise their attitudes to volunteering and consider new and creative approaches to the involvement and management of volunteers. This poses challenges for volunteer managers who must be sensitive to the unique role of volunteers whilst balancing the diversification of the volunteer workforce with the drive towards the increasing formalisation of volunteering (Morris et al, 2013).

The move towards the ‘professionalisation’ of hospice volunteering may benefit organisations in terms of boundaries, management and funding but this may have a detrimental effect on the volunteering experience and on their relationship with patients (Guirguis -Younger, 2005).

Volunteering is an important element of hospice sustainability. If volunteering is to thrive, hospices must ensure that their structures, processes, and attitudes to volunteering take account of the needs and aspirations of both the organisation and volunteers.

#### **Theme 4. External influences affecting volunteering**

Volunteering in hospices is also affected by societal, political and demographic influences which exist both locally and nationally and is also strongly influenced by national history and culture (Goossenssen et al, 2016). Volunteering may also be indirectly affected by palliative care policy. Palliative care has been high on the UK government agenda for some time. The four countries of the UK have policies in place aiming to ensure that all those with palliative care needs, regardless of diagnosis, receive this care (Dixon, 2015) . This drive necessarily contributes to the rise in demand for hospice services with the subsequent need for greater numbers of volunteers.

The nature of volunteering is also subject to considerable change within the UK (Guild et al, 2014). They suggest that this has been driven in part by government promotion of volunteering which aimed to encourage more people to volunteer . However, volunteering is

also affected by changes in society and demographics. Political impacts arising from the 2008 economic crash and the ensuing austerity policies have presented complex challenges for volunteering (Guild et al, 2014). Subsequently volunteer-led services have increased leading to a higher demand for volunteers at a time when prospective volunteers may not have the capacity or time to volunteer. As a result of an ageing population people are now working longer whilst also having caring responsibilities (Guild et al, 2014; Rochster et al, 2010). Improvements in health and changing lifestyles mean that people have more choice as to how to spend whatever leisure time they may have (Guild et al, 2014; Rochester et al, 2010). All these factors impact on the time available to volunteer.

Hospices will undoubtedly be affected by such demographic and societal changes. Hospices will continue to rely on volunteers as a result of the demands made by an ageing population and ongoing economic challenges (Morris et al, 2013). Indeed, it is suggested that volunteers will be essential in enabling hospices to meet future demands (Help the Hospices, 2012). There are clearly challenges for hospices, therefore, in managing the increasing demand for services, coupled with a fluctuating pool of prospective volunteers with changing expectations of organisations (Morris et al, 2013).

The literature findings identify a number of external influences on volunteering beyond the control of hospices. Hospices must continue to assess these changing external influences in order to develop plans to safeguard services so dependent on volunteering.

### **The theoretical model of volunteering impact on organisational sustainability**

The theoretical model of volunteering and hospice sustainability presented in Figure 1 is a synthesis of the findings from the literature review discussed above. It provides a visual representation of themes emerging from the literature and the proposed association between these.

<Insert Figure 1 Theroetical model of volunteering impact on organisational sustainability>

The model illustrates factors necessary for hospice sustainability, influences of volunteering on these factors, organisational influences on volunteering and external influences on hospices and volunteering. Figure 1 highlights that volunteering affects all six sustainability factors. For example skilled and effective volunteers are necessary for the effective governance and leadership of hospices. Volunteers in many other roles contribute to the financial sustainability and cost effectiveness, quality and responsiveness of services. The skills and activities of volunteers within the team extend the skill mix of the hospice team enabling an enhanced and flexible service for patients and families. Volunteers also play a key role in public education through raising awareness of hospice work, making hospices more accessible and developing a reciprocal relationship with the local community. It could be concluded that these activities may subsequently increase the demand for services.

The model also proposes that the Board of Trustees (comprised of volunteers) along with senior staff, in determining the organisation's structure and approach, may empower or disempower volunteering through attitudes and processes. This is likely to affect the continued availability of skilled and effective volunteer trustees, the supply of skilled volunteers in other roles and volunteer satisfaction and retention. Volunteers will be attracted to an organisation that has a positive reputation for volunteering. They are more likely to



remain if they feel valued as part of the team and if their experiences meet their expectations. All this depends on volunteers being recognised and understood by everyone within the organisation.

A further proposition of the model is that a range of external factors such as political, societal, demographic and economic factors impact variously on the demand for hospice services and on financial viability. These same factors, in addition to political influences on volunteering and the changing expectations of volunteers, affect the supply and retention of suitably skilled volunteers.

### **Implications for practice**

The theoretical model provides a clear visual representation of the interplay of factors and the role of volunteers in the sustainability of the hospices. It gives a framework within which organisations may review their governance, funding, service delivery, workforce skill mix and local support from a volunteering perspective. This enables areas of vulnerability to be identified and plans developed to mitigate these.

Whilst it is likely that this model may hold true for similarly structured organisations in the UK further testing is required. It would be helpful to test this model beyond the UK to explore applicability in other countries. Further research on hospice volunteering from a strategic and sustainability perspective is recommended.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review and theoretical model may be the first of their kind to consider the impact of volunteering on organisational sustainability and findings suggest that there is a strong link between volunteering and the ability of hospices to remain sustainable.

Volunteering is changing and it would be inadvisable for hospices to assume that volunteers will necessarily be available or willing to meet the increasing demand that is anticipated.

Volunteering must therefore become an integral part of hospice strategic and workforce planning if services are to remain sustainable. This study offers a new perspective and a model to facilitate the identification of potential risks resulting from fluctuations in volunteering.

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**Table 1 Search terms**

1. Hospice models and	a) Volunteer b) volunteering c) voluntary
2. Hospice development and	a) Volunteer b) volunteering c) voluntary
Hospice management	a) Volunteer b) volunteering c) voluntary
Hospice structures and	a) Volunteer b) volunteering c) voluntary
Hospice organisation	
Volunteering and	a) Hospices
Volunteer value	
Palliative care policy	
Volunteering policy	
Volunteering trends	
Organisational sustainability	
Organisational sustainability and	a) Volunteer b) volunteering c) voluntary



**Table 2: Inclusion Criteria**

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Literature written in English	Literature not written in English
Published between 2000 -2016	
Published papers, including research studies and theses	Volunteer management guidance e.g. recruitment, selection, training, support
Grey literature	Volunteers involved in health trials and research
Government documents on palliative care and volunteering	Literature on informal volunteering
Books and practice literature	Literature on fully funded NHS hospices
Websites for umbrella organisations	
Literature on formal volunteering	
Literature on charitable adult and children's hospices	

Figure 1

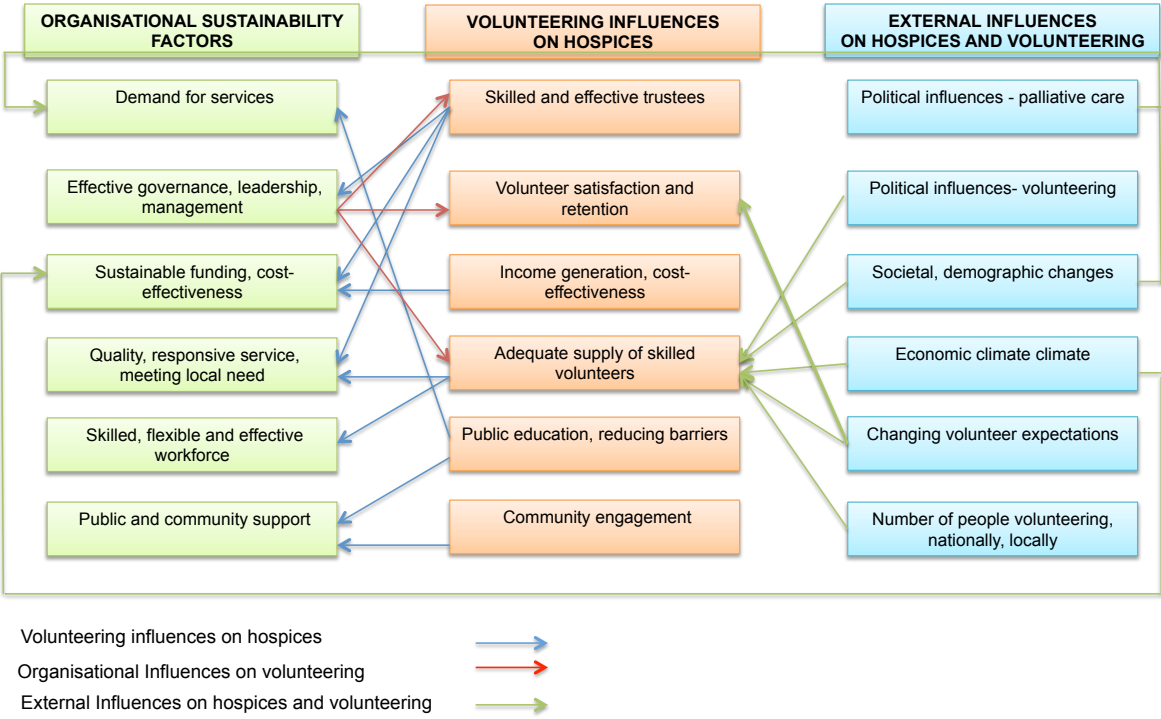


Figure 1 Theoretical model of volunteering impact on organisational sustainability

