

Embedding Frailty-Informed Occupational Therapy within Oncology Services:

A Collaborative Workforce Model to Deliver System-Level Change

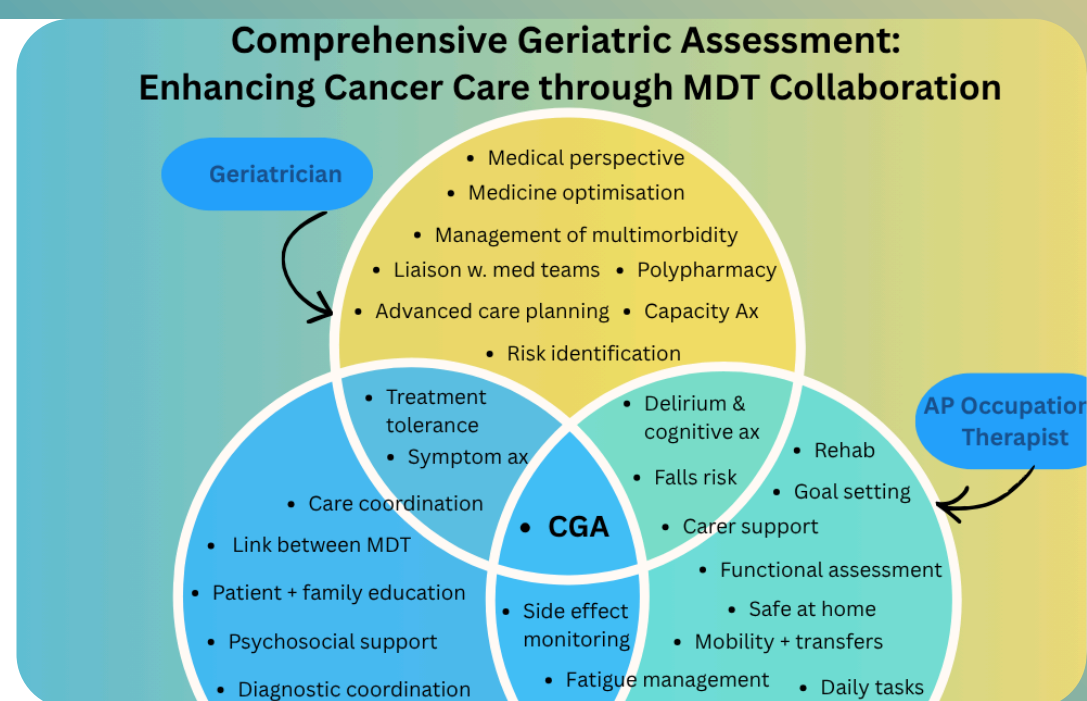
AUTHORS: Carly Rolston, Clinical Specialist Occupational Therapist & Macmillan Project Lead
 Dilan Aydemir, Project Auditor • Aiswarya Santhosh, OT Assistant Practitioner
 Tracy Downey, Clinical Nurse Specialist • Dr. Pamela Seenan, Geriatrician Consultant

INTRODUCTION

Older adults increasingly receive cancer treatment but often face challenges like frailty, cognitive decline, and psychosocial needs, which can affect treatment outcomes. To address this, the Cancer Older People's Service (COPS) at Beatson Cancer Centre introduced a model embedding a specialist occupational therapist within a multidisciplinary onco-geriatric team. This initiative aims to provide frailty-informed care through collaboration and real-time learning, supporting national goals for integrated, person-centered care.

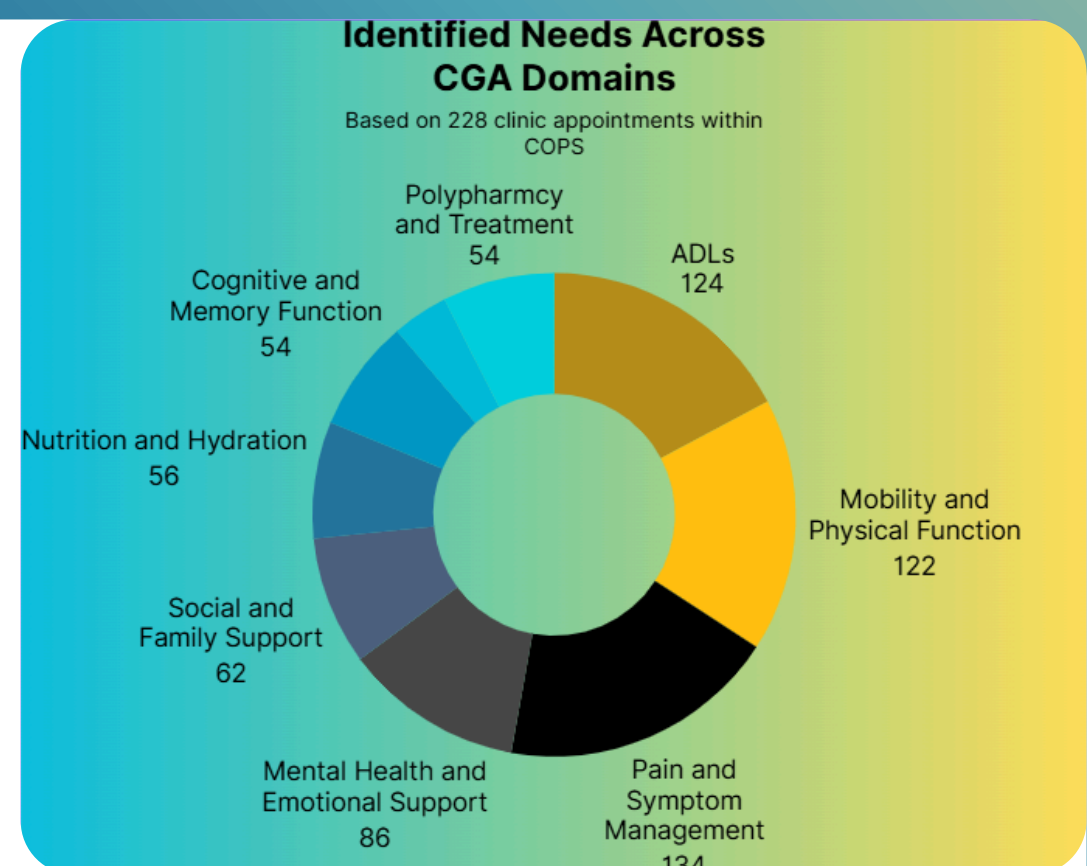
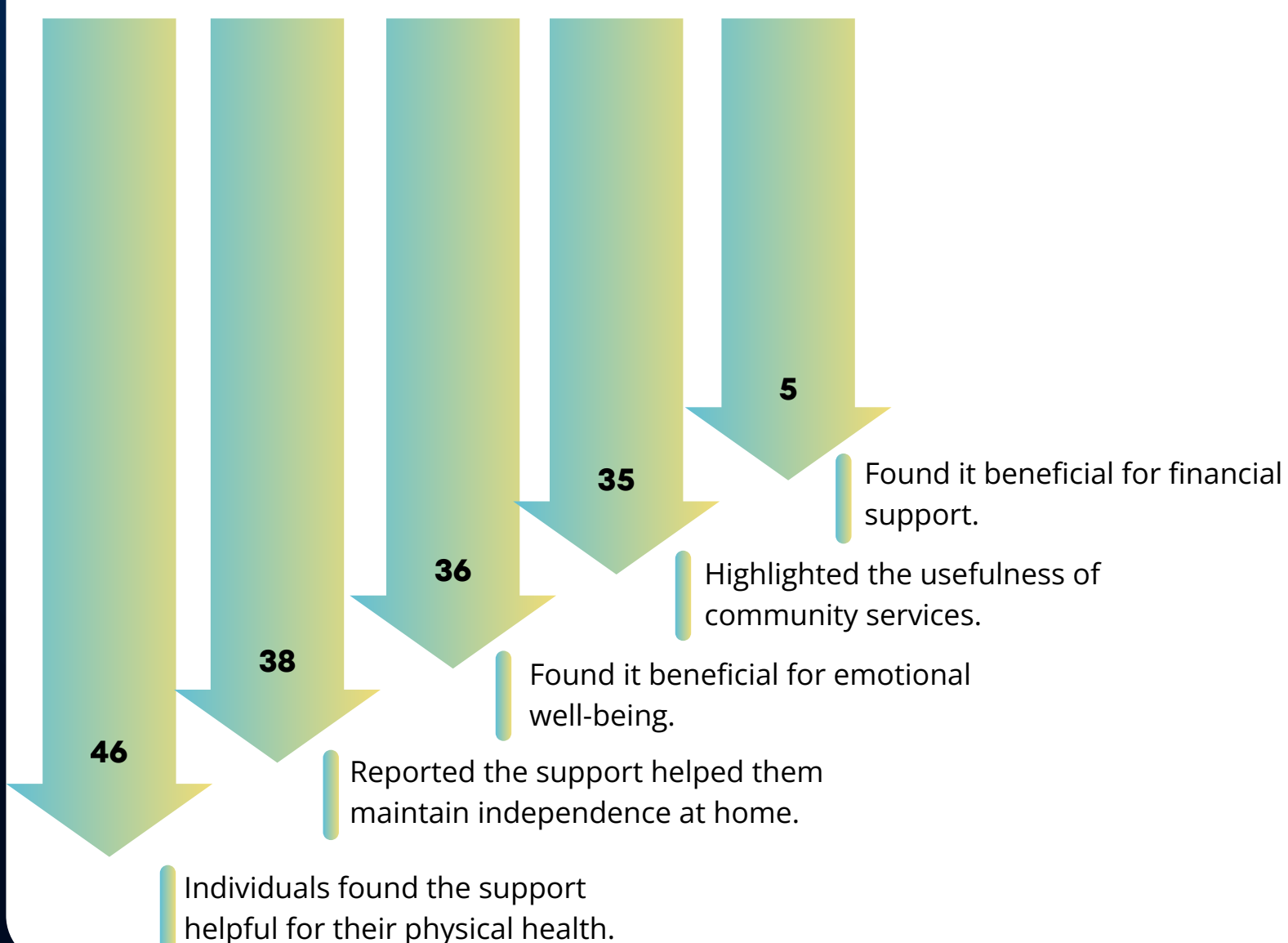
METHODOLOGY

A phased quality improvement approach was adopted over 9 months, supported by third-sector funding. A project roadmap was developed, incorporating literature review, stakeholder engagement and iterative service design. Data were collected prospectively across outpatient clinics and reported quarterly. Measures included patient demographics, frailty indicators, functional outcomes, referral patterns, length of stay, admission avoidance and workforce interactions. Learning was embedded through joint clinics, ward-based consultation, MDT discussion and targeted education, enabling skills transfer across professional groups.



RESULT

The embedded OT role enabled early identification of frailty, cognitive and functional risk, improving patient flow, reducing delays and supporting avoidance of non-elective admissions. Increased demand led to a one-third expansion of clinic capacity, with outcomes reflecting this growth and the evolving scope of the occupational therapy service. A total of 55 responses were received through patient satisfaction survey, consisting of 41 patients, 11 family members/carers and 3 others.



PATIENT FEEDBACK

"I have cancer. Everyone until Carly talked only about my illness. Carly really reassured me that the NHS was interested in me holistically and it felt joined up with a desire to ensure I was being fully looked after. In over 6 months it was the first time I felt I was being treated in the round. It absolutely lifted my spirits no end. A great service filling an important gap."

PATIENT FEEDBACK

"He came out of his appointment much more positive about his condition. There were so many ideas about how he could help himself over the next few months. Having Tracy there too. Looking at his tablets and able to liaise with other health professionals on his behalf was great. As a result, the visit we went straight up to Maggie's and he has been going out much more. Thank you."

CONCLUSION

Embedding occupational therapy within oncology services provides a practical, collaborative workforce solution to deliver frailty-informed cancer care. This model demonstrates how education, innovation and service transformation can be achieved through integrated practice, supporting sustainable improvement across health and social care systems.

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