

Letter

A comment on “Douglas House: a ‘respite’ for young people”

I applaud the Editor and his team for the special issue of *EJC* (December 2003) devoted to the care of the adolescent with cancer, a difficult subject for all those of us involved in cancer care. In particular, I was very moved by the piece by Sister Frances Dominica describing her life-long work in founding first a children's hospice, Helen House, and then a respite facility for adolescents and young adults, Douglas House, a facility for which she coined the term ‘respite’ [1].

I am not a palliative cancer physician, nor even a cancer physician, but simply a breast diagnostician; however, merely as a doctor (or perhaps just as a human being), I cannot help be moved by Sister Dominica's devotion to the care of children and adolescents with cancer. Her recognition that young people have different physical, emotional and social needs from both children and adults, and her vision to relieve some of the terrible suffering for both the young patient and their family during this difficult time, are remarkable. As the global burden of cancer increases, including, as highlighted by Shannon and Smith in the same issue [2], in my own field of breast cancer, generally thought of as a disease of

older women, we need more compassionate revolutionaries such as Sister Dominica.

As the starfish logo of Helen House and Douglas House reminds us, if we can make a difference to just one family suffering the unimaginable burden of a child or young person dying of cancer, we truly have made a difference in this most difficult field.

References

1. Dominica F. Douglas House: a ‘respite’ for young people. *Eur J Cancer* 2003, **39**, 2669–2670.
2. Shannon C, Smith IE. Breast cancer in adolescents and young women. *Eur J Cancer* 2003, **39**, 2632–2642.

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