Use of Diagnostic Ultrasound in a Hospice at Home team:

a Service Evaluation

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Background
Ultrasound is a diagnostic tool that can supplement clinical examination. Members of the Princess Alice Hospice medical team have been trained in using ultrasound to assess for the presence of ascites and whether the urinary bladder is distended. The hospice has purchased a portable ultrasound machine which can be used on the in-patient unit, in out-patient appointments and in the patient’s own home.

Aims
To review whether ultrasounds are being performed for Hospice at Home (H@H) patients and what impact this has on clinical care.

Method
A retrospective service evaluation of the use of ultrasound in H@H patients over a 1 year period.

Results: 10 ultrasounds were performed in H@H patients over 1 year

- Of the 9 ultrasounds performed to assess for ascites:
  - 3 demonstrated large volume ascites, these patients had drains inserted either in the hospice or in hospital.
  - 6 demonstrated small volume or no ascites.
- The patient who had an ultrasound to assess for urinary retention was found not to have a distended bladder.

Conclusion
The use of ultrasound in H@H patients does influence patient care and supports clinical decision making. The value of hospices performing ultrasounds in the community comes from the ability to avoid unnecessary out-patient visits to hospital for ultrasounds, as well as avoiding unnecessary admissions to the hospice in-patient unit or hospital for assessment of ascites. Rapidly establishing in the community whether a patient has ascites, and whether it is amenable to drainage, reduces delays and distress for the patient, as well as reducing the burden on the wider health service.