

A two year audit of the work of a CDOP Bereavement Counsellor

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Background

No parent ever expects that they will have to deal with the death of their child. It is one of the most devastating events that anyone can experience. Surviving the extreme feelings of grief can seem like an impossibility for many bereaved parents. Specialist bereavement counselling can be an integral part of the support that parents need during this time.

In line with national CDOP aims, Wandsworth CDOP in South West London, has funded a dedicated bereavement counsellor since May 2013. In addition to direct face-to-face work, the counsellor has also provided signposting advice, staff support and training.

Aims

- 1) To audit the activity of this service during the two year period since its inception
- 2) To gather feedback from service users and referring health professionals

Results of audit

In total 141 referrals were received. Age at death was under 1y in n=93 (66%) cases and cause of death was related to prematurity for n=70 (50%), reflecting the pattern of child deaths nationally. Usual residence in Wandsworth applied to a minority, n=39 (28%), as most deaths, n= 105 (74%), occurred at St George's Hospital, which has a number of tertiary services eg PICU and Major Trauma Centre.

Of the 40 families who have taken up the offer of being seen, the majority n=28 (70%) were seen for 1-5 sessions (Fig 1). No statistically significant differences in take up rates were found in relation to child age, cause of death (see Fig 2), place of death or borough of residence.

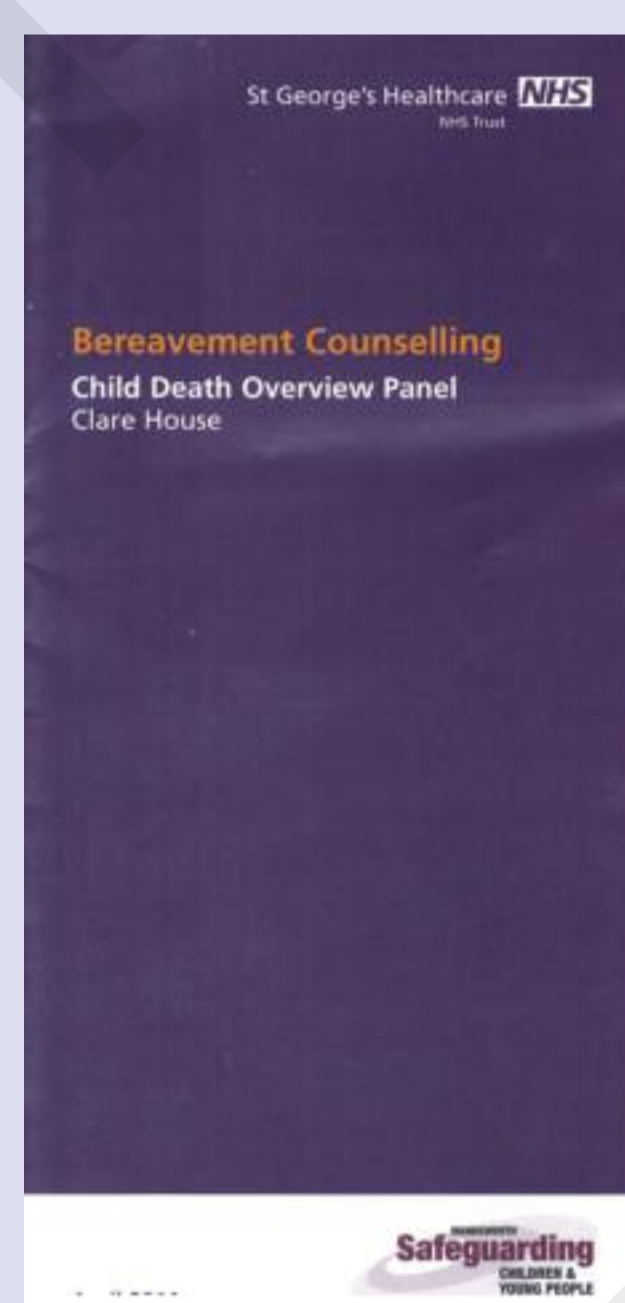


Fig 1: Number of face to face sessions for cases seen (n=40)

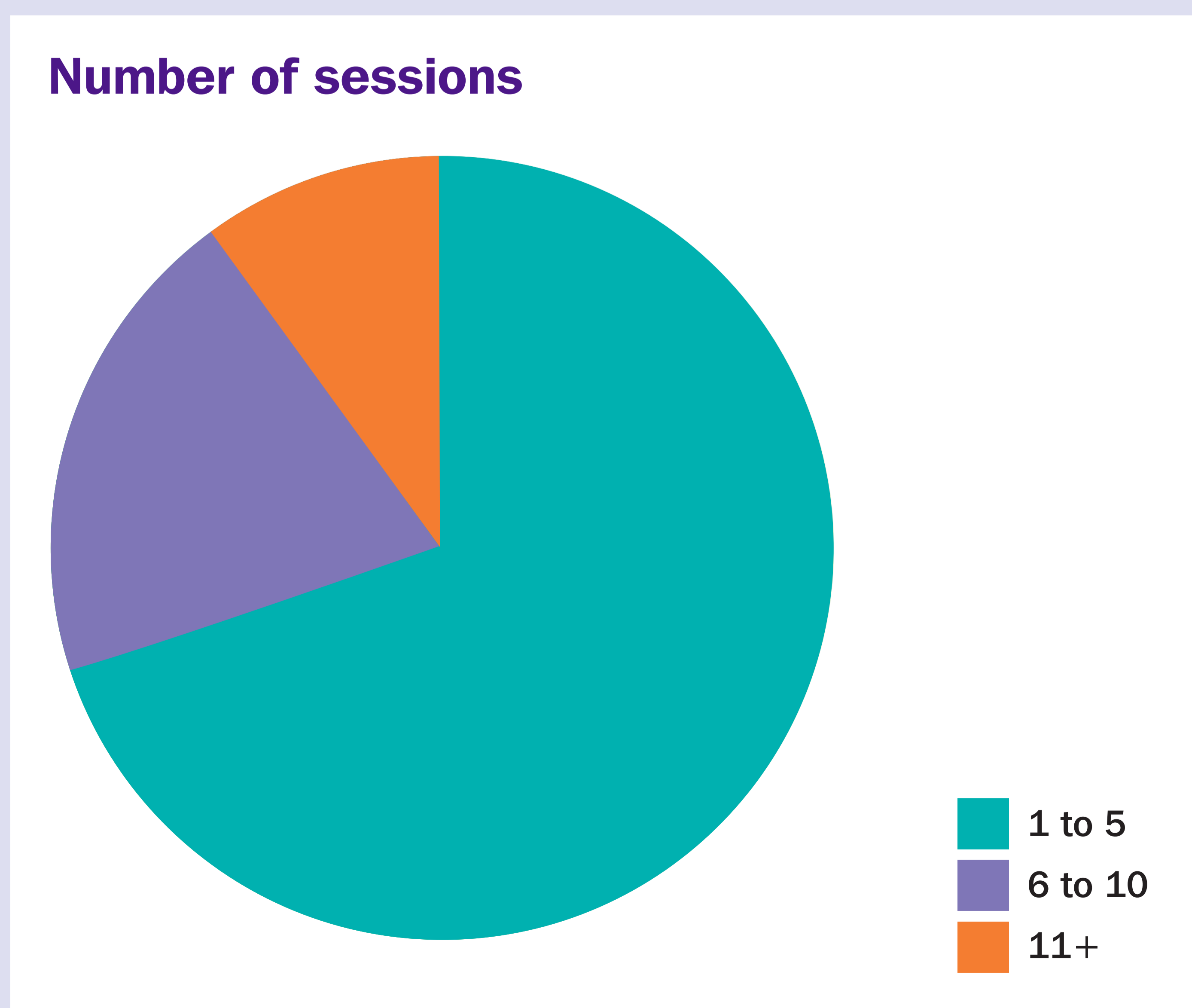
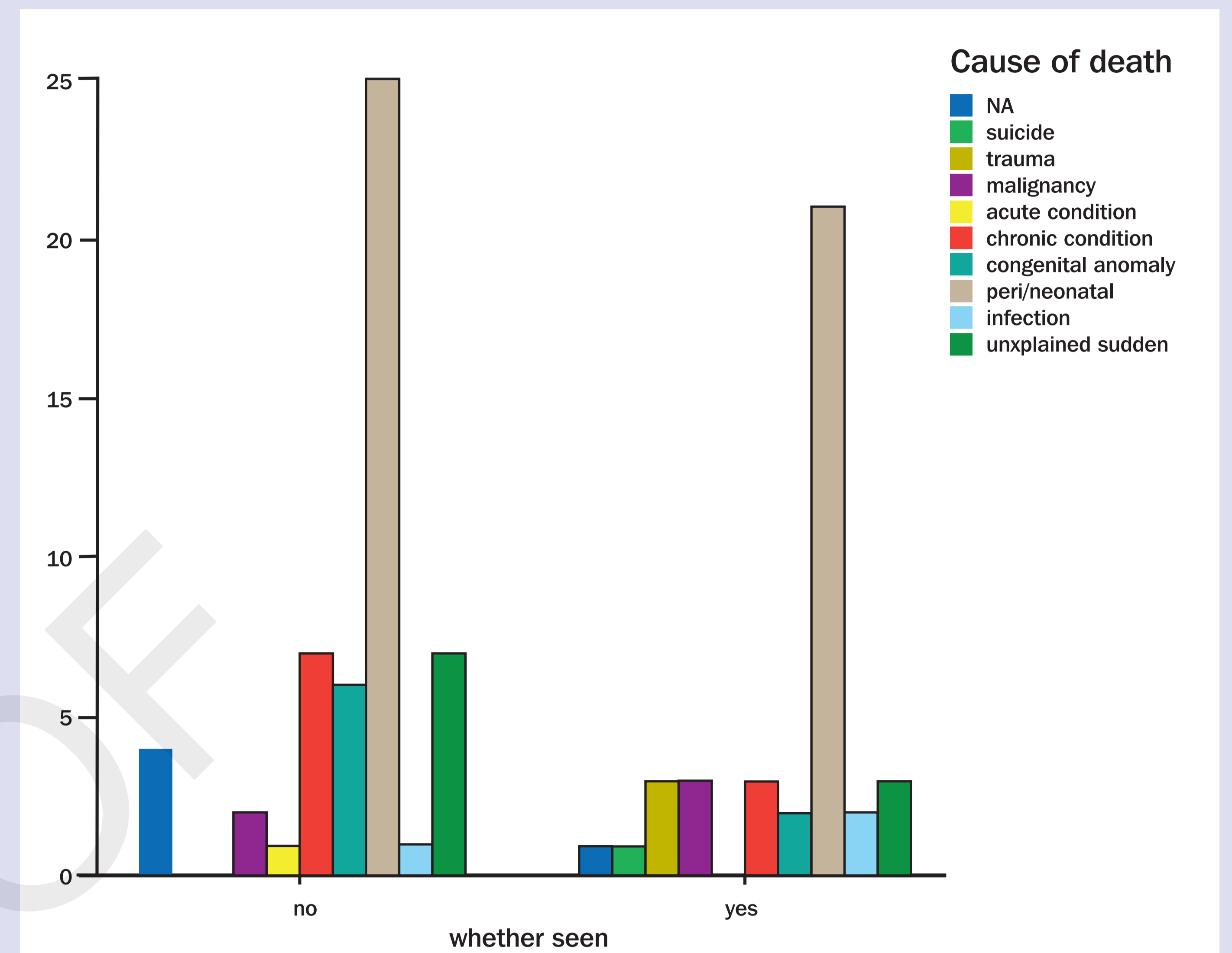


Fig 2: Cause of death for cases seen (n=40)



Parent feedback

I have been seeing the bereavement counsellor regularly... She has helped me cope with the initial shock, my involvement in the local serious incident investigation, my return to full-time work, my desperate desire to have another child and subsequent pregnancy
(Mother of neonate)

This feels like the right place for us to be
(Parents of 12y sudden cardiac death)

Referrer feedback

There have been two instances which illustrate the importance of the CDOP bereavement service to the Neonatal Unit. Having the CDOP bereavement process in place as an independent service, is enormously helpful
(Consultant Neonatologist)

I have been working with the bereavement counsellor following the unexpected death of a child in the Emergency Department. We organised a staff debrief... the feedback from the meeting was that it was useful
(Consultant Paediatrician)

We have been very impressed with your recent training sessions – clearly shows your experience in the field and every session was interesting
(PICU Practice Educator)

Conclusion

Specialist support for bereaved parents is generally not widely available. At a time when parents are feeling most fragile and vulnerable, seeking out specialist support is often something that they simply do not have the capacity to do. It is therefore important that this type of service is more widely available and accessible and that staff involved with these families, be it in a neonatal or paediatric setting, are able to easily refer or guide families to these services. On the basis of the positive feedback from staff and families, other CDOPs may consider offering a similar service.