

Marisa will make sure patients don't fight pain alone

Drop-in centre for
cancer sufferers to
open at the Western

■ CATHERINE SALMOND

WHEN it comes to offering advice to people facing a devastating cancer diagnosis, there is no-one better qualified – she has, after all, been through it all before.

Banking officer Marisa Conde, from Newington, has volunteered her services at a new drop-in facility for cancer patients and their families, opening today at Edinburgh's Western General Hospital.

The 37-year-old said: "I just want to help. If this centre had opened when I was diagnosed, I would have been the first person through the door."

The £100,000 Macmillan Cancer Support facility is a first for the city and will be manned by trained

volunteers – many of whom have battled the condition themselves.

Offering advice, literature and information, visitors will be given a place to learn more about their condition at their own pace, asking questions if and when they want to.

Ms Conde was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in March 2004, having found a lump on her neck one morning.

Within days she was sent for a scan and began six months of chemotherapy treatment on diagnosis.

With all her family in Spain, she relied on work colleagues and friends to help her through the devastating period, which saw her

lose her hair and experience great psychological pain, even after she was given the all-clear.

She said: "I didn't really get any help for that and it's something I feel is so important and can be addressed at the information and support centre.

"When you are battling cancer, the focus is on getting through it. But on the other side there is a lack of knowledge, with emphasis instead placed on being happy that you made it.

"For the first year I was so worried the cancer would come back and also had so little strength."





The centre is a partnership between Macmillan and NHS Lothian, funded partly by a £30,000 donation from city businessman Robert Kilgour and his wife Jacqueline.

Staff at the centre will guide visitors through a comprehensive range of leaflets and books on cancer topics, as well as advising them on free access to complementary therapies, offered by FACE (Fight Against Cancer in Edinburgh).

More than 5,000 new cancer patients are seen at the Western General's Edinburgh Cancer Centre every year, with more than 400 patients accessing the facility every day.

Mum-of-one, Rona Passmore, 47, from West Barns, East Lothian, was one of them when she received treatment last year for ovarian cancer, discovered during a hysterectomy.

Now in remission, the support worker is desperate to help people

who are experiencing diagnosis and treatment and has volunteered to help at the centre.

She said: "I was very lucky because I had a lot of help and support from friends and family, but there are a lot of people who are not in the same position.

"People need help and somebody to talk to."

The centre will be open from Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.

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SURVIVOR: Marisa Conde underwent six months of chemotherapy treatment

