

# Pictor: helping palliative cancer patients and lay carers share their story

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## Background

As palliative and supportive care services continue to develop and expand, patients and lay carers may have many services, from different sources involved in their care. These could include the General Practitioners and their team, District nurses and their team, social workers, formal care packages, respite services, Macmillan nurses, Marie Curie Nurses, hospice services, allied health professionals, religious support networks, community groups, internet groups, symptom specific nurse specialists, as well as friends and family providing support.

We wanted to explore the lived experiences of palliative patients and lay carers who were receiving services from multiple sources. The challenge was how to facilitate people to share these complex and often emotionally charged experiences with a researcher, enabling the exchange of rich data in a manner that minimised potential distress for participants.

## Pictor

Pictor is a technique that helps to reveal the meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their experiences. The technique is based on the principles of phenomenology and Personal Construct Psychology and helps to elucidate the world of the participant with regard to the situation under investigation. Pictor has been developed from a technique used in family therapy (Hargraeves, 1979), the technique was first applied in a research context by Ross, King and Firth (2005) in their research exploring inter-professional relationships and collaborative working. Pictor has more recently been utilised to explore district nursing and community matrons understanding of their own and others roles in palliative care settings (King et al, 2010). The success of this tool for elucidating health professionals experiences, led us to consider using the tool with patients and lay carers. We have modified the original technique by slightly simplifying the Pictor process to facilitate it's usage with lay participants.

### PICTOR METHOD

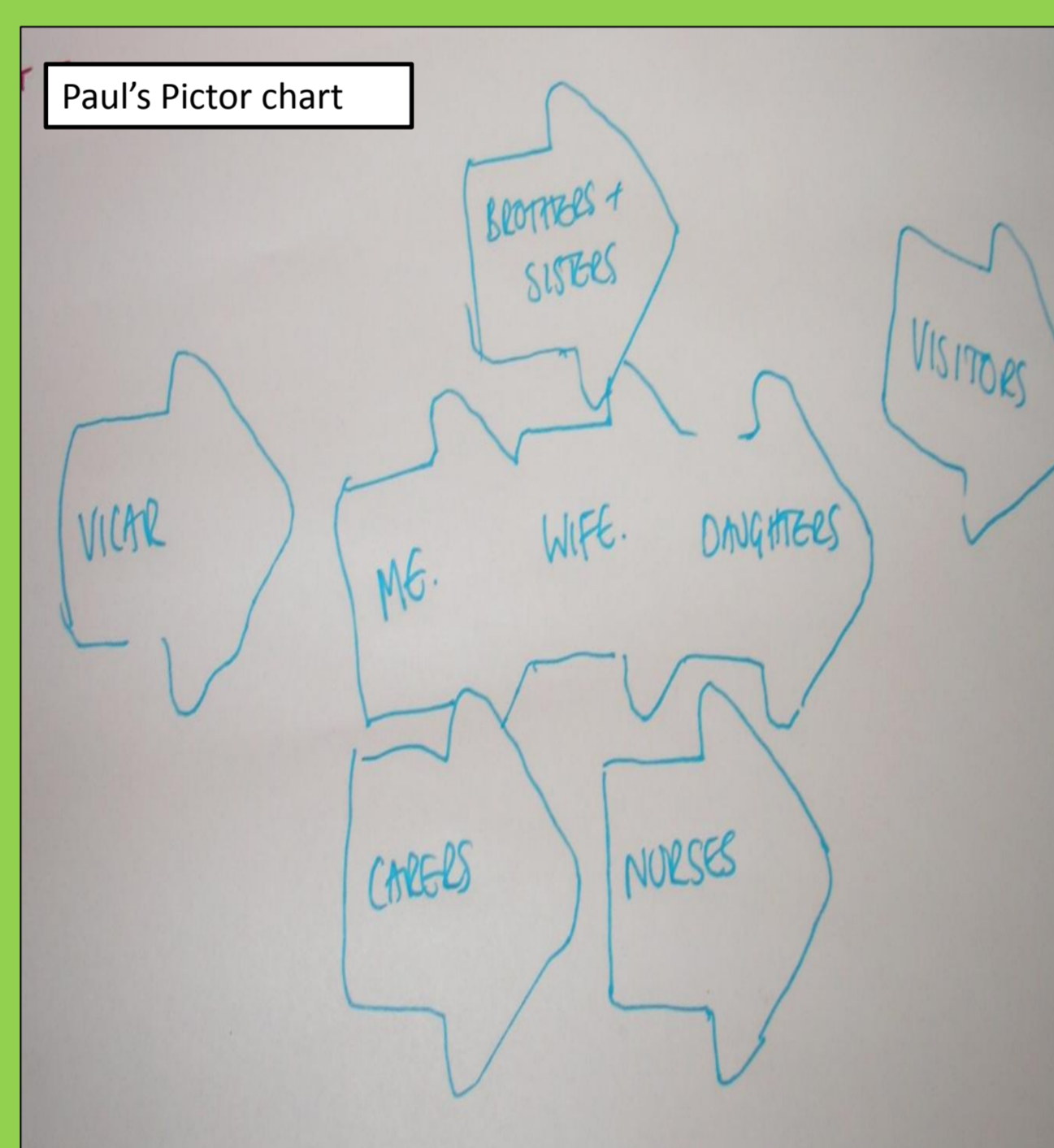
**Stage one:** Participants are asked to bring to mind all the people, services, or other factors that are involved with them because of their current situation and write these on arrow shaped 'post it' notes., including themselves and significant other (the patient or the informal carer).

**Stage two:** Participant asked to arrange these on a large sheet of paper in a way that shows something about the nature of their relationships, utilising the direction of the arrows and the space on the paper to do this. There are no rules about how the participant does this.

**Stage three:** The created chart becomes the basis of the ongoing interview, with extra arrows being added if required. The participant explains their chart, with researcher prompting as appropriate. Following the interview the chart is kept and referred to in the analysis stage of the research.

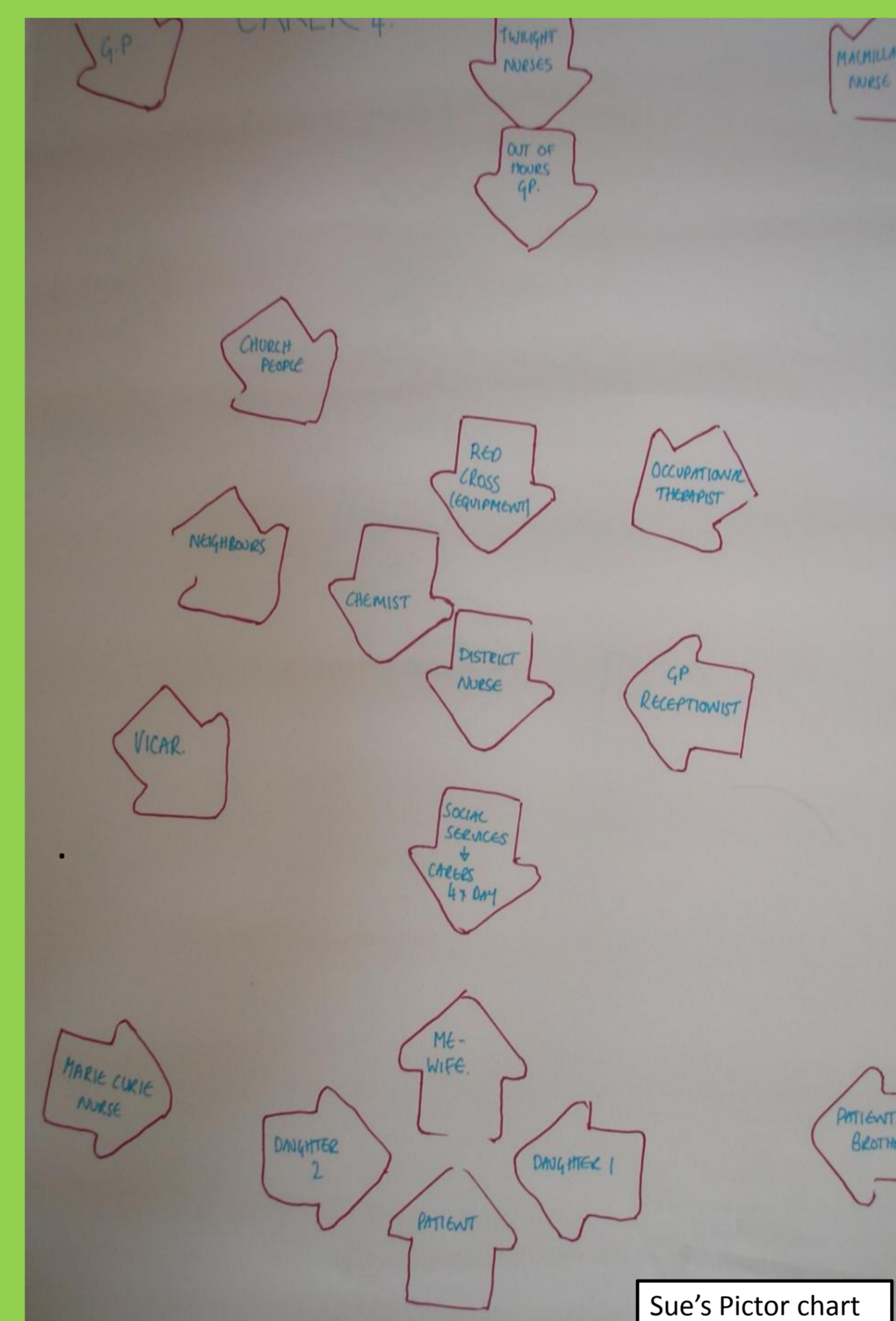
## Example one

Paul has prostate cancer, bone metastases and spinal cord compression. He has been nursed in bed since being 'fast tracked' home from hospital four months ago. Paul is on a long term syringe driver for nausea management. He lives with his wife Sue and has regular contact with his daughters who visit frequently. Through the creation and discussion of Paul's chart it became apparent that Paul had become passive within his situation, trusting his wife to ensure that all his needs were met and services organised. Paul gained a lot of pleasure from people who visited, bringing him stories of the 'outside world'.



## Example two

Sue is a retired librarian and married to Paul. Her Pictor chart shows many different agencies that are involved. In this chart we asked Sue to show her relationships with these different individuals and groups.



Sue used the arrows in different ways. For example GP and Macmillan nurse place a t the outside of the chart as she was angry with these services for not being involved more, and Vicar being fairly close as he had shown understanding by allowing her to keep a mobile phone on in church, this meant that Sue could continue to attend.

## Advantages of Pictor Technique

### For participant

- Pace of interview is directed by participant.
- Breaks in interview (one whilst notes created, one whilst chart created) have advantages for people with disease related symptoms such as breathlessness or pain.
- Participants have time within interview to reflect on their experiences, we have found that this can bring to mind factors which may otherwise not have become apparent.
- Space for 'time out' within an interview – useful when discussing sensitive issues.
- Participant has chart to refer back to if struggling to verbalise their experiences.

### For researcher

- Ensures questioning is closely linked to participants experience.
- If participants concentration is poor then the chart helps the researcher focus the interview on the topic of investigation, asking questions such as: why have you placed the arrows here? why is there a distance between these people? etc..
- In analysis stage researcher has chart to refer back to, adds further element to understanding participants experiences.
- This tool may have benefits for other research questions where the focus is on the lived experience of multifactorial situations.