Providing online, age appropriate support during COVID19: A model for 16-24 year olds with a cancer diagnosis

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**Background/Aim:**
When young people (aged 16-24) are diagnosed with cancer and treated at The Christie hospital, they have access to a multidisciplinary team (MDT). The MDT includes Youth Support Coordinators (YSCs—health based youth workers). YSCs provide a range of social and emotional support to young people both during and after treatment (for up to 2 years) including 1:1 support, ward based workshops, support groups and residential opportunities.

COVID19 brought the whole YSC service to a standstill; young people were required to shield, were isolated even further from their normal environments and peer group and the impact of this isolation was of concern in regards to young people’s wellbeing and mental health.

**Methods: what we did:**
The YSC team, with the support of The Christie and Teenage Cancer Trust, very quickly developed an online programme for young people. A robust consent and risk assessment process was established that young people, having treatment within the Teenage and Young Adult (TYA) service or through the national proton beam therapy service, had to ‘sign up’ to prior to their engagement in the online service.

Alongside continuing individual support via text, phone calls and online sessions, the programme included body image support groups, lads nights in, magic events, quizzes, games nights, ‘An Evening With…’ events (celebrity guests, motivational speakers etc), music tuition, craft workshops, careers guidance, and information events regarding mental health, exercise and nutrition.

An age appropriate mindfulness and wellbeing pack was also developed by the YSC team, with a second edition being made available for young people in Spring 2021.

"Had a great evening guys, thank you so much!"

**Results:**
Young people had a Monday – Friday timetable of events available across 2020 and in to 2021 that provided them with much needed peer support and social opportunities while they were in lockdown and were shielding. Each week between 4-6 events and activities were available online.

Group sizes ranged from 2 to 30 people.

Between April 2020 and April 2021 101 young people took part in at least 1 online YSC session.

**Discussion and conclusion:**
Isolation is commonly an issue for young people having cancer treatment and while they are in recovery. The impact of COVID19 meant this isolation was only increased. The service developed by the YSC team at The Christie meant that young people had a structure to their week, could make friends, gain support and have some fun at a very challenging time.