Background

The COVID-19 pandemic required doctors to quickly adapt to new infection-control policies, rota restructuring and pathway changes. There was uncertainty on how the pandemic would affect paediatrics, as well as anxiety of the personal COVID-19 effects, frustration with media reporting and potential isolation with social-distancing measures.

Our department recognised that both junior and senior doctors needed a platform to come together to address these feelings and reflect on them, ensuring a supportive team at work during this challenging period.

Objectives

To implement a supportive debrief session within the paediatric unit’s teaching programme to improve team morale and reduce anxiety on the uncertainties of the pandemic.

Methods

During the first wave of the pandemic (April 2020-August 2020) we ran a weekly ‘debrief hour’ scheduled within the departmental teaching programme. Co-led by the college tutor, clinical director and trainee representatives, it was open to paediatric junior doctors and consultants. These sessions were held face-to-face and virtually. During the second wave (October 2020-February 2021) these sessions were held fortnightly and were focused on wellbeing. One week prior to each session questionnaires were completed anonymously by junior doctors to collate issues they wished to reflect on. Post-debrief surveys were completed by participants.

Results

We ran a total of 30 sessions. During the first wave 18 junior doctors and 5 consultants on average attended each debrief. Topics of discussion varied from difficult clinical cases and the emotional challenges of the pandemic to learning about individual approaches to mindfulness. Anecdotally junior doctors appreciated this dedicated time to ‘offload’ in a safe space. It helped forge bonds and personal connections within the team. Overall doctors were grateful their wellbeing was prioritised by these sessions.

We took this initiative forward into the second wave where sessions became fortnightly. Our post-debrief surveys revealed that 96% (N=19) of junior doctors valued this time for team reflection and connection. 92% (N=19) found them useful. 94% (N=19) would like to see these sessions continue after the pandemic. Feedback included junior doctors ‘feeling supported’, ‘paediatrics being the best team’ and ‘bonding during a worrying time’. From March 2021 these sessions will be led by the department’s clinical psychologist.

Conclusions

• We advocate scheduling a supportive debrief session within departmental teaching programmes, especially in times of uncertainty and potential anxiety (such as global pandemics). This encourages team bonding.

• Embedding debrief sessions within the teaching programme sends a clear message to junior doctors that the department prioritises and promotes the wellbeing of doctors, seeing it as an important part of their working lives.

• Supportive debrief sessions allow doctors a safe space to ‘offload’ with their peers in a reflective, relaxed environment, thus helping create a sense of community at work and improving morale.

• The department will continue to hold scheduled team debriefs, which will carry on after the pandemic. The Trust recognises the importance of championing wellbeing; moving forward time has been allocated for a clinical psychologist to lead these sessions.

• We strongly recommend that budget planning includes provision for trainee wellbeing support services.

Paediatric Clinical Leaders: Service Planning, Provision and Best Practice

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER – EMBEDDING SUPPORTIVE DEBRIEFS INTO A DISTRICT GENERAL HOSPITAL’S PAEDIATRIC TEACHING PROGRAMME

1Rachel Kirk, 2May Yip, 2Emma Bailey, 2Amitabh Gite, 2Gunjan Jain. 1Addenbrooke’s Hospital, Cambridge; 2Lister Hospital, East and North Herts NHS Trust

Background

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Young People’s Health Special Interest Group

VOLUNTEERING FOR WELLBEING: YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTEERING IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Hannah Pool, Matthew Atkinson. St John Ambulance

Background

There has been significant concern about the wellbeing of children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during periods of lockdown and school closures. Social distancing has led to some young people and their families feeling isolated and unable to access appropriate support. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has highlighted an increase in mental health presentations and disordered eating. Targeting enjoyable and worthwhile interventions which have a positive impact on self-esteem and confidence can improve the resilience of young people.

Objectives

Our aim was to listen to the voices of young people about their experiences of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on their wellbeing so we can shape and influence future opportunities in the youth sector.

Methods

We interviewed young people between the ages of 10 and 17 years who have volunteered with St John Ambulance as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Opportunities they had participated in included:

• Logistics support, including packing and shipping orders for clinical equipment and stocking ambulances

• Training the emergency response and communication course elements for volunteer vaccinators

• Supporting the public working as a vaccination care volunteer at mass vaccination centres

• Facilitating online engagement opportunities for other youth volunteers