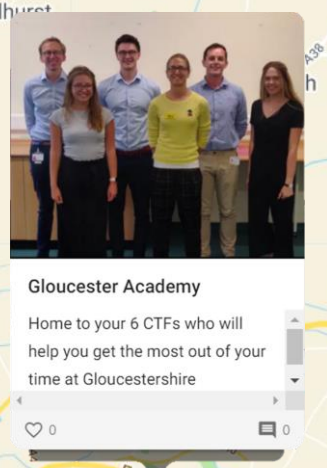


Together Apart: Wellbeing in a Socially Distanced World

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Background

Gloucester Academy supports around 240 medical students from the University of Bristol for clinical placements, with accommodation provided. Due to the number of cases of Covid-19 in our trust and the introduction of the second lockdown we decided to suspend face to face teaching, moving to an online model for three months.

Medical students are known to be a vulnerable group, with higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation than other student groups.[1] The added burden of Covid-19 related psychological distress affecting 27% of medical students coupled with disruption of traditional support structures and increasing isolation due to the restrictions has created a wellbeing gap.[2] We had to transform our approach to create a supportive online environment for students and wanted to share the tools we have most found useful.

[12] Strava is an app that allows you to record and share physical activity with your friends. We used it to create an online exercise club, where we encouraged students to be active.

Evidence Based Practice: Physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of mental health conditions.[3] Active engagement in sport is linked to lower feelings of hopelessness.[4]

[13] Padlet is a website that we used to create an interactive map of the area. This allowed students to easily find local green spaces and places to exercise.

Evidence Based Practice: Low exposure to green spaces has been proposed as an environmental risk factor for developing mental health problems. [5]

Scan the QR code to explore Gloucester!

[14] Virtual 'check ins' were done throughout the week on MS Teams/BB Collaborate. We found this useful to disseminate information easily, avoiding emails, and allowed the students to get to know us in small groups.

Evidence Based Practice: Remote working results in feelings of isolation.[6] Technology can increase feelings of connectedness.[7] Check ins encourage team moral and build interpersonal connections.[8]

[15] Each week we organised weekly competitions, from baking to yoga poses. We found competitions strengthened links between the year groups and provided the students with fun activities to do.

Evidence Based Practice: Creative activities positively affect emotions and mood, both immediately and long term.[9] Team based competitions increase participation in online learning.[10]

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