



AYA NEWSLETTER

How I went from being a teenager facing cancer alone to finding my community...online!

By Sarah Issa

Eighteen is not what I had imagined it to be. While my plans were to start university in the Fall of 2020, cancer had a different plan for me. For a few months, I felt a bump growing above my knee. Doctors tried to put me at ease, telling me that it was nothing to worry about. But once COVID came around, I knew that it was no benign bump and no time to not take my health seriously.

After several ultrasounds and scans, I was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma in my left femur and began six rounds of chemotherapy. My care team did a great job of guiding me through the treatment plan, explaining what would come next and what to expect. But I felt otherwise alone facing cancer at my young age. I knew no one going through what I was going through.

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Goodbye Meghan

Many of you have had the opportunity to connect with our wonderful clinical nurse specialist, Meghan. Sadly, November was her last month with the AYA program. As she moves on to the next chapter in her career, she leaves you all with this message:

“Working with the AYA program has been an incredible experience which is why, it is with mixed emotions that I want to let you all know that I am moving to a new role within the hospital. This past year, getting to know so many of you, has been a privilege that has helped me to grow as a professional and as a person. The AYA program is well supported with an exceptional and caring team including an AYA doctor, Dr. Tushar Vora, and a motivated administrative assistant, Stephanie Stefaniuk. Dr. Abha Gupta remains the program director. Please reach out to them any time at aya@uhn.ca. Best wishes!

-Meghan MacMillan

Everyone I knew my age was starting classes in the fall; I was trying to deal with sallow under eyes and the pale face from treatment. Cancer was treating my body and mind as a physical and emotional battleground.

Although I often had days where I felt 'fine', my thinning hair, sparse lashes and eyebrows told a different story. As quickly as the feeling came, one look in the mirror and I no longer saw myself.

That was until my Social Worker recommended attending a Look Good Feel Better workshop.

They explained to me that there were workshops specifically for teens like me with similar experiences, and I could learn how to handle the physical changes that were happening to me.

Little did I know what was to come from the workshops. I not only learned what types of products to use for my needs, how to deal with my sallow skin, sparse eyebrows, lashes, and do fun makeup looks, but also found myself reflected back in the group. While I admit I am a bit too shy to strike up conversations with other teens right now, it means so much to me to see other girls my age going through what I am going through. It sometimes feels like you are getting ready with your girlfriends to go out; we will be giving each other tips, tricks, and compliments about our looks while the amazing volunteers encourage us to get creative.

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Welcome Dr. Tushar Vora!



Our AYA team will be joined by Dr. Tushar Vora. He has a special interest in improving the journey of AYAs through the conundrums of convoluted cancer care. His specializations include Pediatrics, Oncology, Sarcoma and AYA; and he has experience working in the developing world. He looks forward to learning more, and meeting all of the wonderful AYA patients.

In between feeling queasy and drained from chemotherapy, where I routinely go alone due to COVID guidelines, the workshops are a refuge.

When I feel discouraged about what I am going through and how I look, I try to get creative with my makeup with tips I learned from the LGFB workshops and I don't feel so bad anymore.

When you are a new cancer patient, changes to your appearance can be the toughest aspect to handle. When I started gaining control over my appearance, I started gaining back control over my mental health too. Before I had no clue where to start with feeling better. Now I will get a fun colourful wig or scarf and try to match my eyebrows and lipstick to it!

To any teens newly diagnosed who are reading this: reach out and sign up for a workshop. I know you probably do not think others can feel what are feeling but trust me when I tell you there is an amazing community waiting for you here. You do not deserve to go through cancer alone.

For more information on Look Good Feel Better workshops, please visit: <https://lgfb.ca/en/workshop/about-our-workshops/>



FREE Virtual Support

Facing Forwards Survivorship Group—offered twice per month

Designed to support patients who have completed cancer treatment and are looking for strategies for integrating into the next phase of survivorship. This program is offered in collaboration with Gilda's Club.



Androgen Deprivation Therapy (ADT)—offered once per month

A workshop to answer questions and help manage side effects for Androgen Deprivation Therapy patients.

Low Down on Down There (LDDT) —offered once per month

A vaginal health workshop for women affected by cancer. Learn how to prevent or manage common vaginal and sexual health changes from cancer treatment.

Accepting Your Body after Cancer (ABC)—7 week program

A therapy based approach introducing strategies to assist with positive body-image for breast cancer patients and survivors.

Intimacy After Prostate Cancer (IAPC) —offered once every 3 months

A workshop to help couples create and maintain satisfying sexual intimacy. Open to prostate cancer patients and their partners.

Registration

For information or to participate in these virtual programs contact the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Centre's Patient & Family Support at 705-728-9090 ext. 43520. Registration is open to cancer patients across Ontario.



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