Synopsis:

This lesson is largely a PSHE lesson, with elements of Science and speaking and listening. Students will consider how they understand the word ‘cancer’ and where these views have come from. They will then explore the truth behind a variety of cancer myths and learn about what cancer actually is, explaining this in their own words to cement their understanding. This is important learning because cancer is an issue that affects most people in some way and knowledge will help them to protect themselves both physically and mentally for the future.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this lesson students will be able to agree with some or all of the following statements:
- I am beginning to feel more comfortable discussing the topic of cancer.
- I can talk about things that concern me to help me feel less afraid.
- I can understand that cancer is a disease of the cells that can happen to anyone.
- I can explain how cancer occurs using some correct terminology.
- I know that cancer is surrounded by myths due to societal fear.

Climate for Learning:

Students may have personal/family experience of cancer and this lesson will support their wellbeing. This is a sensitive topic, so they need to be aware that some of the class may have strong emotional responses and that as a class they need to support each other. Ground rules, or a working agreement will be crucial for this lesson. If these have already been agreed for PSHE lessons, then remind the class about them. If not, then you may wish to use the ‘safe environment contract’. See additional teacher’s notes for guidance and the Creating a Safe Environment document.

Context, baseline assessment and reconnecting activity

Some students will have learned about cancer at primary level. The core section of the lesson allows the teacher to assess this knowledge through peer discussion and questioning; this lesson continues to build upon any prior learning.

Students will be asked for prior knowledge of cancer during main session.

If you would like a free Teenage Cancer Trust Education session in your school, please contact education@teenagecancertrust.org. These sessions cover what cancer is, what to look for, how it is treated, supporting a young person with cancer and how a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of cancer in the future.

Resources:

- Teacher’s guidance for Creating a Safe Environment Guidance
- Teenage Cancer Trust Safe Environment Contract
- What is Cancer 1: Resource Sheet 1 – Most Common Cancers In Young People
- What is Cancer 1: Support Sheet 1 – True or False Statements
- What is Cancer 1: Support Sheet 2 – True or False Statements teacher’s copy
- What is Cancer 1: Support Sheet 3 – True or False Statements Record
- What is Cancer 1: Support Sheet 4 – True or False Statements 2
- What is Cancer 1: Resource Sheet 2 – Memory Alley

Introduction (10mins)

Explain to the students that this lesson they are going to think about what cancer is and consider how much of what they know is myth and what is fact. Revisit the group’s agreed ground rules/working agreement for PSHE lessons. If no ground rules have previously been established, discuss what students think these should be. Ask whether they are happy to agree to those suggested in the ‘safe environment contract’, or whether they wish to add anything else. You could hand out the contracts to the students to sign and explain that as this is a sensitive topic, they need to be aware that some of the class may have strong emotional responses and that as a class they need to support each other. Write the word ‘cancer’ on the board and ask students to work alone or in pairs to think about how people may feel when they hear the word ‘cancer.’ Some thoughts might be scared, death, silence, funerals, research, grandparents. Give
the students 5 minutes to discuss the word and then display, using post it notes or just write the words on the board. Ask the students if they see any patterns in the sorts of words that have been suggested. *These are likely to be depressing.*

Explain to the students that often the words/feelings that society associates with cancer are very negative, but that sometimes this is based on myths that are believed to be facts. The objective of the next part of the lesson will be to allow discussion of some of these myths to demonstrate that many are untrue, but that the large number of myths readily encourages fear if all are taken at face value.

**Main (40 mins)**

Next, ask the students to think about what they actually know about cancer. Give the students What is Cancer: Support Sheet 1 – True or False statements, ask them to cut the statements up and divide them into true and false. Alternatively, use Support Sheet 4, where they just need to put a True, False or Not Sure in the box at the end of the statement. The statements are divided into 3 degrees of difficulty (1=easiest and 3=most difficult), so you may choose to differentiate the groups or provide them with mixed statements. There are also some blank statement pieces to allow the students to add in additional statements that they think are true or false. High ability students should be encouraged to add in at least 5 additional statements for the true column. Students should be able to justify why each statement is true or false. *This could be checked by circulating and discussing the decisions with the students.* Once the students have made their decisions, they should stick their statements onto What is Cancer: Support Sheet 3 – True or False Record. This activity should take about 15 minutes.

Order the statements on the board under true and false with the students’ help and ask the students to self-mark by writing a T or F in the box at the end of each statement. Discuss each statement as they mark and ask students to justify the status. Also ask them to feedback any that they are surprised by/do not believe. This activity should take about 10-15 minutes.

Show students the ‘What Is Cancer’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEpTTolbqo) which is 90 seconds long or the longer clip (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kels5alAG8o) which is about 5 minutes long.

Split students into pairs to come up with questions about the film and the myth discussion and record these on a piece of paper. Higher ability students could be asked to use correct terminology when writing the questions. Students should write the answer on the back of the question. This activity should take about 10-15 minutes.

**Plenary (10mins)**

Use What is Cancer: Resource Sheet 2 - Memory Alley to run practical activity to engage all children and assess their understanding of the films watched, the myths discussed and their key messages.