

Artist Impact

Effects of live art on patients and staff in an outpatient chemotherapy treatment environment

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BACKGROUND: Visual art and music have been found to improve the emotions and moods of patients and healthcare staff, and attendance of live performances has been shown to foster social interaction.

OBJECTIVES: The aim of the study was to explore the effects of a visual artist on patients and nursing staff in an outpatient chemotherapy treatment environment.

METHODS: During an eight-week period, an artist painted in an outpatient chemotherapy treatment room, either interacting with patients (six weeks) or quietly painting while wearing headphones (two weeks). A total of 73 surveys were completed by patients and staff, providing quantitative and qualitative data about anxiety, distraction, enjoyment, and social interaction.

FINDINGS: Patients evaluated the experience positively, whether the artist was interacting with them or not. However, according to patient- and staff-reported data, greater social interaction occurred during the interaction weeks. Nurses reported that the artist's presence made their job easier, with a stronger effect observed during the interaction weeks.

KEYWORDS

art; artist; social interaction; chemotherapy treatment; nursing staff

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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ALTHOUGH EXTENSIVE RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE ON ART THERAPY among patients with cancer (Kim, Loring, & Kwekkeboom, 2017; Lefèvre, Ledoux, & Filbet, 2016), exposure to art without accompanying therapy has been less studied. Research exploring the impact of music and visual art on individuals has focused primarily on anxiety. For example, participants reported significantly lower levels of anxiety when classical music was playing in the waiting room of an emergency department (Holm & Fitzmaurice, 2008), a surgery waiting room (Tansik & Routhieaux, 1999), and a radiation therapy waiting room, when they liked the music (Cooper & Foster, 2008). Inpatients with cancer who attended a live music concert reported lower anxiety after the concert (Toccafondi et al., 2017a), and patients hospitalized when a live music concert took place reported lower anxiety at discharge than those hospitalized at a time during which a concert did not take place (Toccafondi et al., 2017b). A meta-analysis by Bro et al. (2018) determined that music significantly reduces anxiety in patients receiving chemotherapy.

Visual art is also associated with relaxation and a reduction in anxiety. Nanda et al. (2012) found significant decreases in restless behavior among individuals in an emergency department waiting room after photographs of nature were displayed, which may indicate that the presence of art led to a reduction in anxiety. Research suggests that observing the creation of art by a live artist may have additional benefits. Live music in a waiting room of a university health clinic was positively evaluated by patients and staff (Silverman, Christenson, Golden, & Chaput-McGovern, 2012). Artists who performed at the bedsides of inpatients receiving palliative care observed relaxation of patients' facial muscles, as well as patients' increased interpersonal engagement and social interaction (O'Brien, Langley, Graves, & Anderson, 2016). These findings dovetail with research showing that live art creates an opportunity for social interaction (Swanson, Davis, & Zhao, 2008) and that social interaction is a recognized motivator of art event attendance (Hager & Winkler, 2012). Attending a live performance allows individuals to share an experience with others, reducing feelings of alienation and isolation (Swanson et al., 2008).

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an artist on social interaction among patients in a chemotherapy treatment room, as well as the effects of this on patient relaxation and general satisfaction with the treatment experience. Also considered was whether the presence of the artist had an impact on healthcare professionals (primarily oncology nurses) working as staff in the chemotherapy treatment room. Healthcare professionals are