

Art in Hospital Setting

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BACKGROUND

What is art? Art can be understood as a universal form of human expression, enabling us to communicate, explore and reflect on experiences, emotions and ideas. John Berger, renowned art critic, describes art as integral to the collective human experience (Berger, 2008). It is this shared sense that art brings us closer to what it means to be human that draws us to it. Ultimately, art is a uniquely human endeavour that offers us a deeper understanding of ourselves, each other and the world around us.

What is medicine? Medicine could be described as an art that applies science to restore and maintain health. Trousseau (1869) stated: "the worst man of science is he who is never an artist, and the worst artist is he who is never a man of science". Historically, medicine was considered an art, existing alongside poetry and painting as a discipline deeply rooted in humanity and expression. Over time, it evolved into

a more structured science, standing alongside mathematics, astronomy, and physics. While this shift brought important advancements, it has coincided with a decline in the humanistic aspects of healthcare, such as the age-old doctor-patient relationship. This erosion of empathy and personal connection risks reducing patients to mere clinical cases rather than holistic individuals. Medicine is inherently both an art and a science -interdependent and inseparable. The art of medicine lies in addressing the human as a whole being - body, mind and soul.

What is a hospital? A hospital is a healthcare facility where individuals receive medical care, diagnosis and treatment for various illnesses, injuries and health conditions. Is there a place for art in the hospital? There is an important place for art in hospitals. Art can contribute positively to the healing environment and improve the overall well-being of patients, staff and visitors. This, in turn, can translate into lower healthcare costs.

What is Arts in Health? The primary purpose of arts in healthcare is to use creative activities to lessen human suffering and to promote health, in the broadest sense of the word" (*Sonke, Rollins, Brandman, Graham-Pole (2009)*). There are several ways the arts can be used in healthcare, and the field of arts in health is considered to comprise of five key areas: Patient care, the healing environment, caring for caregivers, community wellbeing and education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Art has been used to enhance healing at St. Bartholomew's hospital in several ways and across a spectrum of practice. The environment at St. Bartholomew's hospital includes areas of light and space, an attractive courtyard with a historic fountain, original artwork on the walls, and a piano for visitors and staff. Alongside enhancing the physical environment, art is utilised to involve both patients and clinicians in the creative process. This humanizes the hospital. The intention is to enhance wellbeing and inter-personal connection.

A visiting visual artist in the operating theatre, and musicians capturing the sounds of the healthcare environment have both played a role in celebrating staff and patients in clinical spaces, creating meaning, and fostering a sense of connection. These art-based initiatives have spread organically, with the support of clinicians, generating a sense of positivity and inspiring patients to engage in acts of random kindness and creativity, enriching their experience of care.

A more formal approach, an art therapy programme for healthcare staff, led by the hospitals' lead art psychotherapist, proved remarkably effective in reducing burnout and mental distress. Benefits following group art therapy conducted by qualified art therapists were maintained months afterwards.

Additionally, visual art has been employed as an educational tool with trainee doctors through techniques such as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and the concept of "iconodiagnostics," which involves identifying signs of hidden pathology. This approach resulted in very positive feedback as a method of teaching and a tool to improve satisfaction and happiness amongst doctors.

DISCUSSION

Overwhelmingly positive responses to a range of art – based activities, along with formal art therapy to reduce mental distress, has encouraged us to expand and develop these methods within the hospital setting. However, embedding this approach within healthcare organisations requires more than the involvement and engagement of clinical educators, arts therapists and arts in health advocates. It also necessitates the active engagement of healthcare managers. A strategic vision is essential – one that formally endorses and supports an arts programme. Perhaps this vision could be realized through the creation of a dedicated art and medicine department. Without such structural support, it would be challenging to sustain the level of engagement needed to ensure the long-term success and impact of these initiatives.

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