

Bringing art into a Healthcare Facility

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Across the United States, the therapeutic aspect of the arts is gaining recognition. In cooperation with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and Americans for the Arts, the Society for Arts in Healthcare (SAH) recently completed a survey entitled *Cultures of Care: A Study of Arts Programs in U.S. Hospitals*. According to this survey, more than 2,500 hospitals use the arts to “create healing environments, support patient mental and emotional recovery, communicate health information, and foster positive working conditions” (www.thesah.org).

Abbott Northwestern Hospital (ANW), a 650-bed nonprofit hospital in Minneapolis, Minn., is a member of the SAH. Within ANW, the Institute for Health and Healing (IHH) provides integrative medicine services on both an inpatient and outpatient basis. Our vision is to “transform health care to a system that blends the art of healing and the science of curing to optimize the health of the whole person – mind, body and spirit” (*IHH Vision Statement*). We do this by providing the best of conventional medicine in combination with other healing therapies, including acupuncture, massage, Healing Touch, biofeedback, nutrition, yoga and therapeutic arts.

The arts are woven throughout our work at IHH. We have a music therapist, who provides services to patients in the hospital, and the Outpatient Center (opened in July 2004), which offers a monthly community drum circle, therapeutic arts classes (see collage on the next page), and monthly art exhibits. Each art exhibit features a new local artist, whose art is hung along the walkways to the patients’ treatment rooms. Desiring to be reflective of our community, we seek work from a broad range of cultural backgrounds. The artwork speaks to health, healing and spirit – a vital part of the healing environment we create for our patients.

The healing aspects of these art exhibits are varied and far reaching. Healing can be found in the act of creating; for example, one of our artists rediscovered her passion to paint after a cancer diagnosis. Healing also can be found in the contemplation of the finished pieces. In the words of some of our patients. “It’s like coming to

a mini art gallery, only better. I don’t want to ever stop coming for my appointments,” and “This work speaks to my heart,” and “Your paintings help me to actually feel and wake up...they are so ALIVE.” The art brings healing to the community, such as a group show of Hmong American artists that was organized around the 30th anniversary of the end of the war in Laos. According to artist Brian Thao Worra, this show was “about healing not only of the physical-self but the inner-self and the community self, particularly at an intercultural level.” In another exhibit, we showed the exquisite tapestries of a Peruvian artist who uses traditional weaving techniques. Within the community of our hospital, staff often visit our space to view the art and relax from the hectic pace of their days.

The arts are integral to the holistic care we provide and will remain so. Our vision for the future of the arts at ANW includes research into the impact of art on the healing process, incorporating arts programming into more departments throughout the hospital (e.g., our new fitness and wellness facility), the creation of a large healing garden for patients and hospital staff, and continuing to partner with local cultural organizations to bring diverse art and artists into our facilities.

For more information on bringing the arts into your healthcare facility and current research in the field, we suggest you contact the Society for Arts in Healthcare at www.thesah.org. In addition to the wealth of information available on this Web site, SAH also organizes a very instructive international conference every year.

Megan Hatch RYT, is a Healing Arts Practitioner at the IHH. She is a professional artist as well as a yoga teacher and Reiki provider. In addition to providing therapeutic yoga services to patients, Megan curates the monthly art show and plans the arts programming for the IHH.

Lori Knutson RN, HNC, is the Director of the IHH. Her nursing practice spans over 20 years and includes educator, clinical and leadership roles. Lori is trained in biofeedback, Healing Touch, aromatherapy and guided imagery. She has a passion for art and its power in the healing process.



Team-building collage pieced together by Institute for Health and Healing staff.

An Exercise in the Art of Team Building

"A place where you feel happy, whole, at peace..." The staff of the Institute sits in a semi-circle, each envisioning a place in nature that evokes these feelings. Meditating on this image, we reach out to the canvas in front of us and begin to draw. The drawings are the starting point for a collage. Each piece becomes a collaboration; what one person began, others take turns working on. As colorful, handmade paper covers the drawing and as other pieces of paper cover

previous layers, a new image begins to emerge.

The collages take on a life of their own. A drawing of the forest becomes a seascape; a prairie becomes mountains. Each artist's initial vision is broadened and shaped by the group. The final pieces are images of places we may not initially recognize but that speak to us of healing and renewal. Sanctuaries.

What begins as a team-building exercise becomes much

more. The final pieces are a visual representation of the work we do as integrative medicine practitioners — individuals working together to create external and internal spaces in which healing can occur.

PS: After forming a group show in the Outpatient Center, some collages now grace the walls of our offices and meeting spaces, while others have been donated to fundraisers for other healing organizations in the community.