Art Therapy & Palliative Care

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“I could draw it, but I don’t know how to say it.”
The Language of the Unconscious

- Symbolic
- Undifferentiated
- Dreams
- Fantasies
- Fears
- Conflicts
- Memories
- Artwork
“Art does not reproduce the visible, rather, it makes visible.”

Art Therapy Defined

“Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem.”

-American Art Therapy Association
Creativity

- Bilateral
- Multi-directional
- Both vertical and horizontal shifts when processing information
- Unconscious and emotional material combines with cognition
- Verbalizing engages left brain cortical areas and regulates limbic functions
whole person healthcare

- Information is processed:
  - Physically (reptilian brain)
  - Emotionally (limbic system)
  - Intellectually (neocortex)

- Holistic care includes paying attention to body-mind-soul

- 5 Senses
The aim of palliative care is to alleviate symptoms through understanding their origins, and placing the disease in the context of the whole person (Mitchell, 2008)
Figure 1 Spring-like scene depicting June’s desire to be *up and around*. Mixed media. 
*Source*: ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.

(Buday, 2013)
Figure 2  Underwater scene. Materials used: oil pastels and watercolour paints. Source: ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.
Figure 3  Portrait of a woman. Material used: chalk pastels.  
Source: ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.
Figure 4  Autumn flowers. Materials used: fabric, felt, and sunflower seed. *Source:* ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.
Figure 5 Autumn farm scene. Materials used: cotton, fabric, felt, glitter. Source: ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.
Figure 6 Air Balloons symbolizing freedom. Materials used: cotton, fabric and felt. Source: ©Borgess Visiting Nurse & Hospice.
tangible benefits

- Communication of emotions
- Elevation of mood
- Connection to self and other
- Enhanced QOL
Palliative Care: Art Therapy Goals

– Improve Quality of Life

– Symptom reduction:
  • Physical: Pain, nausea, fatigue
  • Emotional: Depression, Anxiety

– Sensory transfer: “In my own experience, the arts helped with my symptoms, distracted me about the reality of nausea and really helped me eat” (Wilmot, C. 2013)
- Stress reduction

- Support emotional, psychosocial and spiritual well being

- Identity

- Legacy
Art Therapy with Palliative Care

• Making art is a momentary distraction from worry and illness
• The creative process enhances relaxation
• Increased focus on something pleasant and meaningful
• Emphasizes what a person can do, not what they cannot do

(Feen – Calligan, 2008)
Process and Product

• The art therapy process is helpful in expressing self outside of illness
• The products created contribute to a narrative of self; telling ones story
• Legacy gifts for others
• Products assist the treatment team and medical staff in understanding of what is important to patients and families
Figure 2 *Galaxies* (5 × 8 watercolor)

(Safrai, 2013)
Figure 3
Something Mysterious (9 × 12 watercolor)
Figure 6  *The Face of a Leader* (9 × 12 watercolor)
tangible benefits

• Painting with the art therapist allowed a shift from anxiety and existential dread to a more fluid awareness of the dying process
• Improved QOL
• Self expression
• Meaning making
• Increased ability to relate to art therapist, medical staff and family members
Caregivers and Family Members

- Art therapy process provides enjoyment and relief from burden
- Allows opportunity to express feelings about caregiving and family members who are sick
- Healthy outlet for frustration and anger
- Provides objectivity and distance
Figure 3  Sample photograph of hand casting.

“Four givens are particularly relevant for psychotherapy: the inevitability of death for each of us and for those we love; the freedom to make our lives as we will; our ultimate aloneness; and, finally, the absence of any obvious meaning or sense to life.”

— Irvin D. Yalom, Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy
References

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References
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