

Future of the Arts and Healthcare Green Paper

Advancing the Arts as Integral to Healthcare – Submitted by the Society for the Arts in Healthcare

Summary

Arts in Healthcare is a diverse, multidisciplinary field dedicated to transforming the healthcare experience by connecting people with the power of the arts at key moments in their lives. This rapidly growing field integrates the arts, including literary, performing, and visual arts and design, into a wide variety of healthcare and community settings for therapeutic, educational, and expressive purposes.

Over the past 50 years, a growing movement in the US and elsewhere has recognized a more integrative healthcare model that incorporates the essential connection of body, mind, and spirit. In this setting, creative activities and the arts therapies are finding their long overdue place in modern Western healthcare. Throughout recorded history, we see evidence that pictures, stories, dances, music, and drama have been central to healing rituals. Today's renewed focus on humanistic care is leading to resurgence in the knowledge and practice of incorporating the arts into healthcare services. Increasing numbers of clinicians and other professionals from the medical community are working alongside arts professionals in both healthcare and community settings, and around the world the arts are emerging as an integral component of healthcare.

Two recent surveys conducted by the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, The Joint Commission, and Americans for the Arts (2004, 2007), revealed that nearly half of the participating healthcare institutions, including hospitals and long-term and hospice/palliative care organizations, reported having arts in healthcare programming (*State of the Field Report [SFR; Washington, DC: Society for the Arts in Healthcare, 2009]*). The three most common types of arts programming are permanent displays of art, performances in public spaces, and bedside activities.

Research demonstrates the benefits of the arts in healthcare in hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, hospice facilities, and other locations within the community (*SFR*). Arts in healthcare programs and creative arts therapies have been applied to address a vast array of health issues—including post-traumatic stress disorder, autism, mental health, chronic illness, Alzheimer's and dementia, neurological disorders and brain injury, and physical disabilities—to improve patients' overall health outcomes, treatment compliance, and quality of life.

Emerging evidence demonstrates an economic benefit. Data show that such programs result in patients requiring shorter hospital stays and less medication and having fewer complications—all of which translate into a reduction in healthcare costs. It is hoped that future analysis of the economic benefits of arts in healthcare programs will advance policy conversations about using the arts to simultaneously reduce healthcare costs and raise the quality of care.

Conversely, a rich and growing body of research connects arts in healthcare programs to improved quality of care for patients, their families, and even medical staff. Studies prove that integrating the arts into healthcare settings helps to cultivate a healing environment; support the physical, mental, and emotional recovery of patients; communicate health and recovery information; and foster a positive environment for caregivers that reduces stress and improves workplace satisfaction and employee retention. Areas of focus include the following:

- ◆ *Patient Care.* Incorporating the arts into the healthcare experience has a positive impact on patient health outcomes. The arts benefit patients by aiding in their physical, mental, and emotional recovery. In atmospheres where patients often feel out of control, the arts can serve as a therapeutic and healing tool, decreasing the perception of pain, relieving anxiety, reducing stress and loneliness, and providing opportunities for self-expression. Art also has

the power to communicate and educate, giving it a growing role of significance in healthcare institutions. In addition to reducing pain medication levels and the length of hospital stays, research shows that the arts can improve patients' compliance with recommended treatments—offering substantial healthcare cost savings.

- ◆ *Healthcare Environments.* The arts create safer, more supportive, and more functional environments in healthcare facilities. From architectural design to art on the walls, from access to natural lighting to the inclusion of nature through landscape and healing gardens, the physical environment has a significant impact on reducing stress, improving health outcomes, enhancing patient safety and overall quality of care, and reducing costs. The physical environment is also important for healthcare workers, reducing error levels and improving their health, safety, job satisfaction, and effectiveness.
- ◆ *Caring for Caregivers.* Caregivers, including family, friends, and healthcare providers, are faced with the realities of human suffering, illnesses, and death. Arts programming for caregivers creates a common, more normative environment and offers opportunities for creativity and self-expression that allow caregivers to healthfully integrate their experiences and emotions instead of carrying them home or into the workplace. In addition, the arts give medical professionals new tools for improving diagnostic and communication skills and can be used to better relay health and recovery information. The arts help overcome barriers by embracing diversity, reinforcing family members' supportive role in the healing process, and changing the culture within the healthcare facility to one that is more supportive and humane.

The Benefits of the Arts in Healthcare

At no other time in history has quality assurance in healthcare been more paramount than it is today. Traditionally, clinical decision-making has been based on intuition, opinions, assumptions, and experience. In today's healthcare world, approximately 30% of all healthcare spending goes toward ineffective, redundant, or inappropriate care, and the scarcity of capital resources in a sagging economy has made the cost of healthcare a prominent political issue, with healthcare decision-makers demanding that decisions be based on evidence (Hayes, "Evidence-Based Medicine Restores Focus on ROI," *Quality Digest* [November 5, 2008]). This strategy, called evidence-based medicine, combines the clinician's individual expertise with the best available external evidence and the values and needs of the patient to determine medical decisions.

As an integral part of healthcare, arts in healthcare must be held to these same standards. Quantitative and qualitative research from across healthcare disciplines—and documented in peer-reviewed journals—provides evidence of both instrumental and intrinsic benefits of arts in healthcare in hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, private homes, and other locations within the community. Research indicates that a physiologic process may actually take place through contact with certain images and other forms of the arts. In an early study, Goldstein (1980) described thrills—tingling sensations individuals may experience when exposed to emotionally arousing stimuli—and showed a relationship between these thrills and the release of endorphins—the body's own pain reliever and mood enhancer. An emerging science that is part of this physiologic research is psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), which is concerned with the interaction between psychological processes and the nervous and immune systems of the human body.

Researchers also are interested in the effects of art in the environment and arts programming on family members and healthcare staff. Most hospital artists-in-residence programs serve both patients and their families and often provide special workshops for staff. According to Penn,

such programming can not only help staff deal with the stress of caregiving, but also provide them with tools to help patients tell their life stories and connect with others, thereby building relationships through the art medium itself (“Using Patient Biography to Promote Holistic Care,” *Nursing Times* 90, no. 45 [1994]). Many medical schools, recognizing the arts as a powerful educational tool, are incorporating the arts and humanities into the medical curriculum, and nursing and other healthcare disciplines are increasingly following suit.

Only recently have we begun to look at the economic benefits of the arts in healthcare. In 2009, Cohen published findings that quality-of-life outcomes for arts program participants directly translate into cost-saving outcomes, such as the need for fewer doctor visits and less medication. Other researchers (Staricoff, Loppert, Duncan, and others) are considering the impact of active, integrated arts programs in healthcare environments on staff employment and retention. Considering both the rising cost of healthcare and the need to retain nurses—the single largest group hospitals employ—research of this nature can have a tremendous impact on struggling healthcare systems.

Measuring is occurring on two levels: (1) evaluation, which is typically undertaken to measure the effectiveness of a particular project or program, and (2) traditional research, which is interested in building theory and the knowledge base of the field. Although evaluation has progressed at a faster pace than traditional research activities, quantitative research in arts and healthcare is now paralleling the evidence-based movement in the larger healthcare field throughout the world (*SFR*).

Summary of Research

The limited-but-growing pool of documented evaluations, observations, and research findings demonstrates both instrumental and intrinsic benefits to the arts in healthcare. Conducting effective research in the field requires researchers who are experienced in arts in healthcare methods and techniques, as well as funding from sources that recognize their potential. Other considerations concern issues of clarity—about what to measure, the distinctions between curing and healing, and the intended effects of integrating the arts into healthcare. Such clarifications will drive methodology for researching both the instrumental and intrinsic benefits of the arts in healthcare.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have a role in this endeavor. Patton writes: “It is crucial for validity—and consequently, for reliability—to try to picture the empirical social world as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be; thus the importance of such qualitative approaches as participant observation, depth interviewing, detailed description, and case studies” (*Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods 3e* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002], 53). Hamilton, Hinks, and Petticrew note:

In the health field, proper recognition of the health effects of interventions and resources are likely only to follow from good evidence that they achieve their intended health and well-being outcomes. ... A scientific approach to evaluating the arts may help move the debate about the arts and health beyond anecdote and opinion (“Arts for Health,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57 [2003]:402).

The scientific approach is producing mounting evidence that the arts are truly making a difference in people’s lives in all types of healthcare settings, playing a significant role in humanizing healthcare for individuals and families and the healthcare providers who serve them. Simultaneously, emerging data regarding the economic benefits of arts in healthcare programs

indicate how this growing field can become part of the solution to our current healthcare challenges.

Moving Forward

Arts in healthcare is steadily moving forward. Increasingly, healthcare administrators are not only welcoming but also financially supporting arts programming in their institutions. Medical and nursing schools see the value in incorporating arts in healthcare courses or content to help their students develop essential skills such as observation and communication. Arts institutions, schools, and colleges are partnering with healthcare organizations to provide arts programming and health promotion experiences in community settings. Architects and designers are creating healthcare facilities that are not only beautiful but also informed by solid evidence concerning the safe delivery of care, seeking to provide the most positive outcomes for patients, their families, and healthcare staff.

The *State of the Field Report: Arts in Healthcare 2009* (see www.thesah.org) verifies that the benefits of arts in healthcare are not limited to a select group of privileged individuals. Illness has a very leveling effect, and the very nature of the arts means that everyone—regardless of ethnic group, race, age, economic status, or geographical region—can enjoy all that the arts can bring to healthcare experiences.

Changes in the American economic and healthcare systems, coupled with the growth of our aging populations, bring opportunities for expansion of the arts in healthcare into rural communities and the realms of public health, social services, and human services. Advocacy and interdisciplinary collaboration at both local and national levels are key to meeting these challenges and to the provision of healthcare that balances technical excellence and humanistic treatment.

Although continued research explaining the positive outcomes of the arts in healthcare for patients, families, and staff is paramount, our current economic crisis demands that research demonstrating the financial benefits must parallel these efforts. Evidence of monetary benefits can provide the arts in healthcare field a seat at the table when tough decisions are made.

With the launch of the Society for the Arts in Healthcare's journal, *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, and other specialized journals relating to the field, a true sense of professionalism is settling in. Professionalism also is reflected by the development of coursework and training programs in higher-education institutions to prepare individuals to provide safe and effective arts in healthcare services. Beginnings of certification and accreditation are in the air.

From the beginning of recorded history, the arts have been central to the human experience. In our contemporary moment, as our expansion of knowledge outpaces our ability to understand and use it, we begin to pay attention to our basic human needs for safety, community, art, and music—to unlock their meaning and harness their power. This is at the heart of the arts in healthcare movement.