

Healing With an Artistic Touch

Barb Henry, APRN-BC, MSN

A dear friend of mine who lost her battle with ovarian cancer said, "Cancer equals waiting." You are either waiting for doctors' appointments, tests, results of those tests, treatments, and results of treatments. This is a stressful time for the patient, their family members, and friends. I would therefore like to provide them with something pleasant to look at and reflect on during those often difficult moments. —Judy House

This quote, taken from the Healing Quilts in Medicine (2006a) Web site, is the foundation for the vision of Judy House, a well-known quilt artist who died in her home under hospice care after a nine-year battle with breast and ovarian cancer.

"Judy was just one of those special patients that you always remember," said Carlton Brown, PhD, RN, AOCN®, one of Judy's chemotherapy nurses and former head nurse at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC.

Steve House, Judy's husband of 40 years, said that "Judy was a Navy wife and former nurse who saw many military hospitals over the years with rather bleak surroundings. She wanted to provide something whimsical and pretty to brighten things up for other patients going through treatment and the staff."

Judy's priceless legacy of Healing Quilts in Medicine provides healing from those stressful times through the beauty of the quilts and stories behind each one.

According to Healing Quilts in Medicine (2006b), the subject matter of the wall hangings includes plants, such as the sweet potato, the may apple, Pacific yew, and periwinkle that form the foundation for chemotherapy treatments for a variety of cancers. Each wall hanging has accompanying educational material



Encouraging Words by Sandi Goldman. Image courtesy of Healing Quilts in Medicine.

and suggests a pleasant and peaceful setting to the viewer.

Impact at Walter Reed

I chose the Madagascar periwinkle plant, used in two drugs (vinblastine and vincristine) to treat certain types of leukemia, as the background canvas of my quilt. The words are the focal point to inspire and challenge the patients, families, friends, and staff of Walter Reed Army Medical Center to do whatever is necessary to fight a horrible disease. —Sandi Goldman

Encouraging Words is one of the quilts in the inpatient oncology ward at Walter Reed where Jeannie Lamb, BSN, OCN®, is the current head nurse. Lamb said that "the quilts have had a very positive impact on our patients and caregivers" and, because the quilts are exhibited throughout the outpatient and inpatient treatment areas, "we often see people stopping in the halls to read the stories of the quilts and admire the colors and plants of chemotherapy. The quilts really stand out, and they are even more beautiful in person than the pictures on the Web site."

Barb Henry, APRN-BC, MSN, is a psychiatric nurse practitioner with Psycho-Oncology Consultants, LLC, in Cincinnati, OH.

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/08.CJON.695-696