

Stories of Breast Cancer Through Art

Julie A. Ponto, RN, MS, AOCN®, Marlene H. Frost, RN, PhD, AOCN®, Romaine Thompson, Teresa Allers, Tracy Reed Will, MA, Katie Zahasky, RN, MA, Kay B. Thiemann, MBA, Jane H. Chelf, RN, MDiv, Mary E. Johnson, MA, Sylvester Sterioff, MD, Joseph Rubin, MD, and Lynn C. Hartmann, MD

Purpose/Objectives: To describe the use of an art exhibit, created in response to breast cancer survivor stories, and additional supplementary activities to increase cancer awareness and provide support to those with cancer.

Data Sources: Published articles and books, personal experiences.

Data Synthesis: Art has been used to educate and promote the expression of emotions. Using an art exhibit as the central feature, a planning committee composed of staff members and volunteers developed a repertoire of activities to improve cancer awareness and provide support to cancer survivors. Visitor and staff reactions to the event were profound.

Conclusions: Art can capture the most intimate and personal aspects of the cancer experience. This event was a novel and effective way to increase awareness about the cancer experience. The event brought together patients, family members, friends, staff members, and the community and facilitated new partnerships to help people with cancer.

Implications for Nursing: Nurses are well equipped to direct the therapeutic use of art and support the potential reactions of viewers. Nurses can promote the benefit of art exhibits for cancer education, support, and awareness and use their knowledge and skills in planning and implementing supplementary activities.

Key Points . . .

- Art can elicit profound emotional and intellectual reactions.
- The process of creating art has been used therapeutically to help patients with cancer express their thoughts and feelings, and poster art has been used to convey health messages to the public.
- Hosting an art exhibit and organizing supplementary supportive and educational activities are unique and powerful, albeit intensive, cancer awareness activities.
- Merging science and art can lay the groundwork for a variety of cancer educational opportunities.

mentary activities to increase cancer awareness in the general public and provide support to those with cancer. The responses from attendees and staff are described.

Literature Review

The Therapeutic Effect of Creating Art

The use of art as therapy has evolved from a relatively reactionary, arbitrary means of expression to an intentional and planned therapeutic endeavor. As a therapeutic intervention, for example, art has become increasingly popular in healthcare

Julie A. Ponto, RN, MS, AOCN®, is an oncology clinical nurse specialist, Marlene H. Frost, RN, PhD, AOCN®, is a professional associate in research, Romaine Thompson is a project assistant, and Teresa Allers is a clinical assistant, all in the Women's Cancer Program at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center in Rochester, MN; Tracy Reed Will, MA, is a communications consultant at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester; Katie Zahasky, RN, MA, is a nurse practitioner in medical oncology at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center; Kay B. Thiemann, MBA, is an administrator in the Division of Patient Support Services, and Jane H. Chelf, RN, MDiv, is a health educator, both at the Mayo Clinic; Mary E. Johnson, MA, is a chaplain at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center; Sylvester Sterioff, MD, is a surgeon at the Mayo Clinic; and Joseph Rubin, MD, and Lynn C. Hartmann, MD, are medical oncologists, both at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center. (Submitted May 2002. Accepted for publication February 3, 2003.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/03.ONF.1007-1013

Finding novel ways to increase cancer awareness and provide support to people with cancer is an ongoing challenge. Most healthcare institutions and cancer advocacy organizations continuously strive to find creative ways to accomplish both of these goals. The Mayo Clinic Cancer Center in Rochester, MN, successfully implemented a unique approach to address these goals by hosting an art exhibit and organizing supplementary activities for cancer survivors and others interested in cancer issues.

Art can elicit significant attention and emotional reactions. Throughout history, artists purposefully have used their art to raise awareness, communicate their feelings, and stimulate reactions regarding politics, religion, nature, and other complex topics. Works of art such as Salvador Dali's *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man*, Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, or Norman Rockwell's *Sunset* communicate powerful messages and have the ability to elicit significant emotional responses. Harnessing and directing the emotional potential of art can raise awareness about cancer and its effects and can be powerful communication and therapeutic tools.

This article outlines the use of an art exhibit, created in response to stories from breast cancer survivors, and comple-