

A creative art expression intervention using hand lettering was implemented on an outpatient oncology unit and evaluated for feasibility and its relationship with stress and anxiety in patients with cancer. Results suggest that a hand lettering intervention is feasible in this type of setting and may benefit patients experiencing stress and anxiety during outpatient treatment.

AT A GLANCE

- Hand lettering is a safe, low-cost, noninvasive, and nonpharmaceutical intervention to administer to outpatients with cancer.
- Institutions may implement hand lettering to occupy patients with cancer while awaiting treatment.
- Hand lettering as a creative art expression intervention has produced observed benefits for outpatients with cancer experiencing stress and anxiety.

KEYWORDS

patient anxiety; nurse–patient relationship; expressive art techniques; stress

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/21.CJON.97-99

Creative Art Expression

Using hand-lettering techniques to reduce stress and anxiety in patients with cancer

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Hand lettering is the art of drawing beautiful letters. It is an understudied form of creative art expression that is easy to use, has a low time burden, requires little resources, and can be adapted to a variety of settings. A grant funded by the Integrative Nursing Program at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, was used to develop an institutional review board–approved exploratory study using a creative art expression intervention with the guidance of a nurse scientist. This intervention was chosen specifically for patients with cancer because of the emotional distress and anxiety surrounding cancer diagnosis and treatment. A cancer diagnosis and treatment often lead to significant stress, anxiety, adjustment issues, and emotional disturbance (Underhill et al., 2012). Patients have expressed that psychological distress associated with treatment can be just as overwhelming as the physical side effects.

Previous studies have examined the effect of creative interventions on a patient's mental, physical, and spiritual state (Bilgin et al., 2018; Lane, 2005; Saw et al., 2018). Art intervention programs currently exist in a variety of settings, including art therapy courses and art-making experiences in outpatient oncology and blood and marrow centers (Götze et al., 2009; Lawson et al., 2011). Creative art processes are one therapeutic strategy that may lead

to feelings of healing and reduced anxiety through the expression of emotion (Boehm et al., 2014; Meyer, 2012).

The backbone of this creative art expression intervention was Watson's theory of transpersonal caring (Watson, 2019). Watson's framework incorporates the philosophy and science of caring and includes four components: human being, health, environment, and nursing (Petiprin, 2016). This model was appropriate for the application of creative art expression in this ambulatory environment because of its emphasis on the role of nursing in facilitating therapeutic relationship with human beings. Major assumptions of Watson's theory include (a) effective caring promotes patient growth, (b) faith and hope provides a sense of well-being through meaningful belief systems, and (c) nursing communication validates positive and negative patient expressions (Current Nursing, 2020; Petiprin, 2016). This intervention provided patients the time and space to self-direct a creative experience that promoted a sense of autonomy. The nurse promoted healing through presence and encouraging exploration of words pertinent to their healing process. Such holistic nursing measures have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety and increase quality of life for patients (Liu et al., 2016). In addition, tenants of integrative nursing and Watson's theory demonstrate that presence can promote coping and expression of feelings, leading to a deeper connection (Watson, 2019).