

Independent Project

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Introduction

The world health organisation describes health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. (WHO, no date)

The inspiration for this thesis came from my personal connection between art and health. I was diagnosed with Epilepsy at the age of six and over the years I found that creating and viewing art, especially nature scenes appeared to have a calming effect on me, thus lowering my stress levels and reducing the risk and number of seizures. I also took inspiration from my mother who as a therapist was deployed to work at the Ysbyty ‘r’ Seren field hospital in Bridgend between June 2020 – May 2022 during the covid-19 pandemic.

This thesis is an attempt to examine the claims that art may be beneficial to health and wellbeing and is set over three chapters.

In chapter one I will look at the history of art in the hospital setting, where it first originated from and where the inspiration came from. I will discuss Florence Nightingale (a nurse) and Sheridan Russell (a doctor) who both saw potential benefits of art in hospitals and how it could affect patients’ recovery. The chapter contains research into a covid-19 field hospital, including an image of just one of the local pieces of artwork which was displayed there by a local artist named David Hurn. There is reference to research articles and opinions by Lankston, Ulrich, Nielson, Staricoff, Behrman, Agnihotri, Mckee and Healy.

Chapter two focuses on systematic reviews and case studies which, have been conducted on art-based interventions with patients of all ages who have a range of different health conditions. Although this area is very broad this thesis will look at only

a small few: Cancer, Dementia, Palliative care (terminally ill) and Paediatric patients and whether art has impacted positively or negatively on their illness, treatment, wellbeing, and recovery. It includes images and information about an art-based programme which was developed at the Churchill Hospital cancer centre, part of Oxford university hospital trust. This chapter will mention research articles and opinions from the authors Funch, Scheidt, Malchiodi, Bozcuk amongst others.

Chapter three takes us away from the hospital setting and discusses the effects of producing art on the artist who is suffering from a physical or mental health condition. I will briefly mention a few different artists who have used art to express their emotions during ill-health. My focus will be on a case study of the artist Tracey Emin and her own personal journey through cancer and how making art helped her through her treatment and recovery.

The research accumulated throughout this thesis is aimed at providing an insight into whether taking part in art-based activities, viewing art or being in an aesthetically changed environment provide any positive benefits to health, wellbeing and recovery.

Chapter one:

Visual Art in the hospital setting

As far back as the 1800's hospital reformer and nurse Florence Nightingale talked about the importance of colour and objects in recovering from illness, she saw how important the role of art was as a form of medicine to aid recovery.

The effect of beautiful objects, of variety of objects and especially brilliance of colour is hardly at all appreciated ... Little as we know about the way in which we are affected by form, by colour and light, we do know this, that they have an actual physical effect. Variety of form and brilliancy of colour

in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery.

(Nightingale,1859)

Paintings decorating hospital walls can be traced back to the 14th century when many hospitals were run by churches. Religious images were put on display aimed at getting the sick to pray for their health and recovery. Over the years the type of art displayed as evolved into more relaxing pictures such as landscapes and nature which are reported to give a sense of calm to the patients.

Back in 1959, one hundred years after Florence Nightingale first discovered the importance of views and light in the healing and recovery process, Sheridan Russell a medical doctor decided to display a piece of artwork onto a wall in a busy hospital corridor. People reacted positively to the artwork which got Sheridan thinking that displaying art could be beneficial to the patient's health and recovery. As a result, the art for health charity 'paintings in hospitals' was founded, and is still active today, loaning artworks and art activities to hospitals and other health care settings. (Paintings in hospitals, 2017)

Several studies have shown that the physical environment positively impacts on patients and researchers claim that art or arts-based activities are of benefit to health and wellbeing. In his article Agnihotri discusses the importance of the design of health care buildings and how it can impact greatly on the patient's overall health and recovery. (Agnihotri, 2022)

A Department of Health Working Group on Arts and Health reported that the arts have '*a clear contribution to make and offer major opportunities in the delivery of better health, wellbeing and improved experience for patients, service users and staff alike*'.**REF(reword this)**

In 2010 a review was conducted to evaluate the use of visual art in three of Scotland's newest hospitals: the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, the new Stobhill Hospital, and the new Victoria Infirmary in Glasgow. Examining how different colours and scenery may affect mood or emotions and provide positive distractions. Although the researchers conclude that the standard of evidence is not that great, it is still the consensus that displaying art within a hospital setting appears to have a positive effect on the health and well-being of both patients and staff (Lankston et al, 2010) In this journal article the authors inspect facts and information from a statement which was made in 2006 by a department of health working group on arts and health who claimed that there was a connection between viewing art in hospitals and benefits to health and wellbeing.

Ulrich's famous 1984 study examined the recovery time of patients who had undergone cholecystectomy surgery over a period of approximately ten years at a hospital in Pennsylvania. Some of the patients had views of nature and landscape through their windows, while others had views of brick walls. The study showed the effect that the view from the window can have on healing. Ulrich's theory was that natural views seemed to reduce stress and agitation in patients (Ulrich, 1984)

Covid 19 and field hospitals

The covid-19 pandemic in 2022 saw the set-up of temporary field hospitals across the United Kingdom, ironically referred to as 'Nightingale' hospitals. Ysbyty'r Seren which was located in a warehouse on an industrial site in Bridgend was like going back in time, although clean and sterile there was no natural light or windows. A long way from Ulrich's theory '*that a hospital window view could influence a patient's emotional state and might accordingly affect their recovery*' (Ulrich, 1984) The patients in the field hospitals recovery was a slow

process more likely linked to the fact that there were no windows or natural scenes, time stood still, and the patients had little or no concept of whether it was day or night.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg university health board in partnership with National Museum Wales and the Welsh government arranged for artwork to be displayed on the walls with an aim to aid patients' recovery and bring them some sort of comfort during their period of isolation from the outside world.

A 2017 study found that artworks which were displayed on walls in hospital settings created an environment where patients reported they felt safe (Nielson, et al,2017) the authors also discuss how the artwork displayed is set into the background around the patient, but it still enhances their feelings making them feel safe, providing them with comfort and gives them a better experience of their stay in hospital.

In their report Mckee and Healy discuss the benefits on patients' wellbeing when they are subjected to displays of art on hospital walls, not only benefiting patients but also staff and visitors. (Mckee and Healy, 2000).

Although conditions were much cleaner and more sterile in the field hospital this can be linked back to Florence Nightingales time where there was inadequate lighting within health care settings. Nightingale talks about how 'the nerves of the sick suffer from looking at the same walls and ceilings (Nightingale, 1859) this was echoed in the mental wellbeing of the patients within the field hospital. The Art council of Wales reported that the paintings were a way of enhancing the vast empty space, and used to encourage the patients to get up from their beds and walk around between the paintings, where they had the opportunity to reconnect

with the familiar people and places depicted in the paintings (The Art council of Wales, 2018)



Figure 1: Monday wash day. Rhondda wash day, David Hurn (1972)

Image one was just one of a group of paintings from the local area made by the artist David Hurn between the 1960's – 1980's, they were displayed in an area as you entered the ward within the 'makeshift' hospital. Staff were encouraged to take the patients to the area where they could view the images and recall memories of familiar routines from home. It was also a good incentive to get patients mobilising and improve their exercise tolerance (

In his article Staricoff talks about how health and wellbeing is influenced by a clean environment and how views of nature and visual stimulation such as direct light can encourage more positive outcomes for the patients (Staricoff, 2006) Behrman states 'that many doctors are now convinced of the healing effect of an aesthetically charged environment'. (Behrman, 1997). Many doctors are now

becoming more aware of the connection between art and healing and are now referring patients to art groups which is now known as ‘social prescribing’.

The Welsh NHS confederation claim in their overview report that ‘The arts can make a powerful contribution to health and well-being’ and that ‘the evidence suggests that the engagement with the arts can improve a persons physical and mental well-being.’ (*Welsh NHS confederation, 2018*)

Back in the 1980’s a group of volunteers came together at Stanford hospital and covered the walls with displays of art, like Sheridan Russell they could also see the benefits that art had on the ability to heal. With the rise of the new Stanford hospital the aim was to benefit healing through arts and nature. The hospital boasts a vast four acres of outdoor gardens, with floor to ceiling windows in every room which enables the patients to look out at the beautiful nature views to aid their recovery. The health board set up an art commission which consisted of 14 volunteers and have 400 pieces of original artwork (Stanford health care, 2019) As mentioned earlier this is like Ulrich’s opinion that patients who had hospital rooms with windows required less pain relief and recovered faster than patients in rooms without windows (Ulrich, 1984), this was probably because they had a better environment than others. In the case of Ysbyty’r Seren field hospital as mentioned above, the environment severely impacted the patient’s wellbeing and recovery due to the lack of windows and natural light, their only comfort was the artworks that were hung on the walls which gave them some sort of hope.

In July 2017 15 schools from across Swansea all contributed to a 60-metre-long artwork at Morriston Hospital, which was situated outside the building while renovation work was being completed, the aim of the project was to make a

positive impact on the experience and wellbeing of patients, staff, and visitors. An initial survey of responses as shown that 100% positive feedback was received (Arts in health, 2017)

Chapter 2: Art and health conditions

In the arts council of Wales report 'Arts and health in Wales' they claim that a range of art-based activities have been completed with patients with a range of both physical and mental health conditions which has helped to improve health, wellbeing and has improved quality of life. (Arts council of Wales, 2018)

Art for cancer patients

Studies have shown that expression through art can help people with depression, anxiety, and cancer. A cancer diagnosis is stressful and often brings emotional, physical, and psychological problems, with patients experiencing fatigue and pain. Art is known to have therapeutic values and it can be used as a form of release and expression. A systematic review carried out in 2018 on the benefits of art therapy on women with breast cancer found that there were significant benefits, with participants reporting reductions in anxiety, depression, and fatigue. (Tang et al, 2019)

A study which was conducted at Memorial Sloan Cancer Centre was aimed at introducing art therapy intervention as a supportive measure to adults who were in isolation. The researcher's aimed to assess how patients would use the program and to identify which patients would benefit from the art therapy. Nine patients were seen for two sessions per week while they were in isolation for bone marrow transplants. They were asked to do free personal images, with a combined total of forty-two images completed by all the patients. On analysis it

was shown that the patients used creative art to help raise their positive feelings, to minimise their worries and to give them more purposeful meaning. The final conclusion was that the use of creating in art may be beneficial for those patients who have to deal with the worries and stress of life and death (Gabriel et al, 2001)



Figure 2: 'Water falls'

An Oxford university hospital has introduced an art programme centered around the idea of landscapes and bringing the beauty of the outdoors into the indoors. Set up in the new cancer unit of the Churchill hospital with the aim of creating a welcoming and inspiring environment for all who come through the doors. The aim is that the environment and artworks will offer hope and a distraction from illness and empower the patients to be more engaging in their treatments. There is an assortment of images throughout the area including a mural in the café area, a history wall and illusory windows and a doorway with photographic views of an

imaginary garden of healing plants. Above is illustration two 'water falls' which was created by the artists Andrew Moor and Harry Cardross. A beautiful creation that has water made of glass cascading down a rock face and winds down to the bottom. The colours shift around to provide a shimmering effect to give the sense that the water is moving, undoubtedly providing a feeling of calmness to all.



Figure 3: 'The Garden' Anna Helrich and Leon Palmer

Figure three shows an illusory doorway created by the artists Anna Helrich and Leon Palmer, situated in the waiting room of the chemotherapy department. The photographic view gives the impression that the door is open and leading out into a garden where there are healing plants. (Oxford university hospitals, no date)

A study on 72 cancer patients in a chemotherapy day unit who were asked to participate in a painting art therapy programme found that water colour painting

as a form of art therapy improved quality of life and depression in patients with cancer. (Bozcuk et al ,2017)

Art with Palliative care patients

Palliative care offers physical, emotional, and practical support to people with a terminal illness. A study conducted between July 2012 and December 2013 was aimed at exploring whether engaging in artistic activity can contribute to a reduction in symptoms experienced by palliative care patients. Researchers concluded that art therapy was beneficial in reducing distress within palliative conditions (Lefèvre et al, 2016). Stress is one of the major influences in terminally ill patients, Ulrich believed that reactions from stress such as increased heart rate and increased blood pressure could have a profound effect on medical outcomes (Ulrich, 1992) A study conducted in Taiwan assessed the effect of art therapy with terminally ill cancer patients. They conducted a variety of visual art appreciation and painting sessions with the patients to evaluate the effects on their cognition, behaviours, and feelings. While participating in the therapy sessions 70% of the patients reported that they felt more relaxed and 53.1% reported they felt much better physically. It was concluded that participating in both visual art appreciation and hands on painting benefited the patients. (Lin et al, 2012)

According to his essay 'what is art' in 1897, Leo Tolstoy believed that 'art was a communication of emotion' and 'a way of promoting mutual understanding, as reported by (Jahn, 1975). Art can act as a refuge from intense emotions when someone is coping with an illness.

Art for Dementia

There is growing evidence that art improves brain function by influencing brain wave patterns, emotions, and the nervous system. Art has also been reported to enhance cognition and memory. There have been several studies conducted proposing that art improves quality of life for those who suffer with Dementia and Alzheimers disease. A 2009 short documentary film 'I remember better when I paint' was inspired by the true story of an Alzheimer's patient. While painting this lady showed improvements with her speech and mobility which also improved her quality of life. According to the documentary drawing and painting stimulate memories in people with Dementia and allow them to reconnect with the rest of the world. (Scheidt, 2016)

According to Dementia UK, painting has proved to be particularly helpful when communication in verbal form is more difficult or lost altogether due to Dementia. Preliminaries suggest that painting and drawing enable communication through imagination, helping the person feel reconnected to the world and people around them. (Dementia UK, 2020)

A more recent systematic review by (Emblad et al, 2021) examines 17 studies conducted between 2015 – 2020, consisting of 853 participants made up of 657 people with Dementia, 180 carers and 16 volunteers. Concluding that patients with Dementia benefit from participating in art therapy and there was an increase in them communicating with their carer's.

Malchiodi believes that neuroscience (the study of the nervous system) provides a good understanding of how the body reacts to stress, trauma, and illness. He also believes that it is linked to how images influence emotions (Malchiodi, 2003)

Adult Colouring books are a popular therapeutic activity for people of all ages, research has shown that it benefits Dementia sufferers by reducing anxiety and agitation.

Art with paediatrics

Several studies claim that the using art therapy with children can help them to search and understand their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In children with cancer, it has been shown to help ease their symptoms, worries, and improve their quality of life. A study was conducted which was aimed at examining what effects drawing had on depression in children with depression who also had cancer and were having chemotherapy treatment. The study was carried out on children between the ages of 7 – 12-year-old. After completing Maria Kovacs children's depression inventory, a tool used to evaluate levels of depression, 65 children were chosen at random who had high depression scores. They were then divided into two groups, an experimental group, and a control group. Experimental group children took part in open painting sessions for a period of 6 weeks after which the depression inventory was repeated. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the children's depression scores both before and after the intervention. Ther researchers concluded that painting was effective in reducing depression (Tahmasebi et al, 2017).

Desmond et al say that 'Verbal and emotional forms of expression can be difficult for children who have experienced trauma' and they believe that creative techniques can allow Counselors to help explore stories of trauma with young clients. (Desmond et al, 2015)

More recently a scoping report conducted by (Ullán and Belver, 2021) looked at 79 publications from between 2000 – 2019 on the use of art in children's hospitals. The conclusion was that the use of Visual art in hospitals enhanced the wellbeing of the children and their families.

Malchiodi believes that 'art is a visual language for children and a developmentally appropriate form of communication' (Malchiodi,1999) **R**

Funch believes that works of art can wake up past emotions and provides therapeutic approaches. He also argues that when we are faced with works of art they are link to our emotions and senses (Funch, 2021)

Children who have experienced trauma often find it difficult to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions as often the traumatic memory is buried deep inside. (The British association of art therapies, 2019) state that visual art can be used as a therapeutic intervention as a way of expressing those intricate thoughts and emotions that cannot be verbally shared.

(Suter and Baylin, 2007) claim that art provides an aesthetically pleasing environment and enhancing people's moods, it gives an opportunity to interaction with others, including the patient and the care provider. In their study patients reported that art displayed in their rooms had a positive affect on their mood. Staff said it made the environment more pleasant and uplifting and family reported it offered comfort and a distraction for their loved ones.

Recent research on the use of visual art has focused directly on its psychological and physiological effects, mostly in health care settings such as hospitals. It has shown that engaging in visual art interventions have effects on the individual by reducing distress, increasing self-reflection and self

awareness, altering behaviour and thinking patterns, and also by normalizing heart rate, blood pressure, or even cortisol levels. It has also been linked to reducing the need for pain medication and reducing the length of stay in hospital.

Chapter 3: Case studies of artists and how they expressed their feelings into their artwork.

The artist and illness

Many artists have been known to portray their illness through their artwork, for instance Vincent van Gogh depicted Edvard Munch both depicted their mental health illness through their artwork. More recently Tracey Emin an artist renowned for her work with raw materials continued her theme throughout her cancer journey. She was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2020, during this time she kept a hospital diary of her journey, writing notes and keeping records of everything. Emin reported that it was not a case of making the art about her cancer but more about documenting her experiences as to how she felt emotionally as that's what she as always done, Emin reported that after her biopsy she woke up to a vision of her dead cat Docket. She realised that this was a dream and she had been stuck somewhere between the dream and the reality, probably influenced by the medication she had received, this is when she began her idea for her paintings. (The Guardian,

After realising this was a dream and the blurring between dreams and reality is where her paintings began. (The Guardian, 2021)



Figure 4: *'Like a cloud of blood'*

The above painting 'like a cloud of blood' is the very first painting that Emin completed after being ill. Emin stated that she was so proud and happy that she was expressing herself and that the painting expressed optimism.

This is an example of how she was unable to do what she loved during her treatment which was frustrating. As soon as she was able to paint Emin reported that there was an outpouring of emotion and she felt fantastic and felt alive. She described the feeling of being able to [paint again as an explosion it to an explosion. Figure four shows the first painting Emin did as soon as she was well enough. The painting captures the very powerful release of emotion and energy she experienced after a long period of being unable to make art and that all came out as soon as she applied her paint brush. The above painting 'like a cloud of blood' is the very first painting that Emin completed after being ill. Emin stated that she was so proud and happy that she was expressing herself and that the painting expressed optimism.

Conclusion

This thesis was developed because of my own neurological illness epilepsy and my love of art and nature. I have found a personal connection between the two in the sense that art brings me comfort, relaxes my mind, and aids my recovery following seizures. Research and studies have shown that there is significant evidence that art has a positive effect on health and wellbeing. Art for benefits of health and well-being has become more noticed over time, with many more evidence-based studies emerging. A growing number of hospitals and health boards are now investing in arts-based programmes to assist with aiding recovery, with doctors now recognising the link between art and healing.

Several of the studies and research areas recognised the importance of the physical environment on the impact of health and recovery. Florence Nightingale – colour, objects, light, landscapes, and nature. Sheridan Russell – Hanging artwork on a busy hospital corridor, The Scottish hospital study on the positive effects of colours and scenery and how they affect mood and emotions. To Ulrich and his theory of the effect that views can have on the healing process, specifically natural views and how they reduce stress and agitation. All leading to the same conclusion that what is viewed in the health care environment can impact greatly on the patient's physical health and wellbeing. The research shows that certain types of artworks such as nature can help to reduce stress, arouse emotion, reduce pain and the need for pain medication. There is evidence also that artwork needs to be of a suitable

content as it could increase stress and have a negative effect on health outcomes.

There are many studies and reviews available on a range of health conditions with a few being discussed in this thesis, Dementia, cancer, Paediatric conditions, and palliative care are just a few, all of which use similar approaches with both viewing art and creating art. Although the conditions and patients differ in age, cognition, and ability the outcomes appear to be the same and art is found to have a positive impact health and wellbeing.

Chapter Three examines the effect of art for healing on an artist with the evidence showing that creating art was a release after her cancer treatment and was a release that allowed her to unleash her built up emotions and provided her with instant relief.

Limitations

There is limited data available on the effectiveness of the art-based intervention within the Bridgend field hospital, this could be due to it only closing in May 2022 and reports are maybe yet to come. I had hoped to spend some time there with therapy staff and patients, participating in the art sessions and studying the effects on patients' health and wellbeing outcomes, however this was not possible due to covid restrictions, sadly, I feel it would have been a valuable contribution to this thesis. I was able to gather some verbal feedback through my mother and a colleague who worked with the patients throughout 2020 – 2022. They both reported that most of the patients were happy to engage in both visual and creative art-based activities and felt that it gave them

purpose and motivated them to engage in acts of daily living, with only a small number of patients refusing to participate.

The overall conclusion to this thesis is that engaging in either creative art or simply viewing art appears to be beneficial to health and wellbeing and generally promotes positive outcomes,

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Illustrations/Images

Figure 1: Monday washday, Rhondda valley. Available at:
<https://museum.wales/collections/online/object/4f418410-b36d-3123-91bd-97b06d0ffe9/Monday-wash-day-Rhondda-Valley-Wales/>

Figure 2: 'Waterfalls' Oxford university hospitals (no date) *Art in the cancer centre*.

Available at: <https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/cancer/centre/art.aspx> (Accessed:10th

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Figure 3: 'The Garden' Oxford university hospitals (no date) *Art in the cancer centre*.

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Figure 4: 'Like a cloud of blood' Available at: [Tracey Emin's Like a Cloud of Blood, an intimate vision of her experience with cancer | Christie's \(christies.com\)](#)

