

How art therapy improves the lives of patients with mental disorders

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How Art Therapy Improves the Lives of Patients with Mental Disorders

More than often, many patients struggle with managing their thoughts and emotions from not only staying in the hospital, but more importantly their diagnosis. The experience of the particular illness a patient may have, can be very stressful for them. Not only physically, but mentally and emotionally, which can delay their development, growth, and healing. There are many therapies that health care professionals can use to help their patients to get better, however Art therapy can be the most beneficial treatment for some patients who need ways to let out stress. Art therapy is an alternative therapy that motivates patients to understand their thoughts and feelings by creatively expressing it through art.

Through art therapy, patients can gain self-discovery of their emotions. They also gain personal fulfillment that creates a feasible reward that helps build confidence. They gain Empowerment, in which they can gain a sense of control over their emotions and fears. Relaxation and stress relief is also another benefit of art therapy. When stress is not dealt with properly, stress can be detrimental to both the mind and the body. Stress can weaken and damage the immune system . When the immune system is weakened the patient is risk for developing circulatory issues and irregular heartbeats (Gale, 2015). Art therapy is something that is part of a psychiatric inpatient or outpatient treatment program, that can happen in in-group or individual therapy sessions.

Art therapy has the advantages of providing empathy, support, and positive social interactions from peers. In art therapy, art therapists use materials such as canvases, crayons, poster board, colored pencils, crayons, glue, wood, brushes, sticks, glue guns, anything you can make art with¹ the work space is often created in a room that has adequate lighting, has comfortable chairs and tables, and is a quiet/peaceful environment that the patient can enjoy (Forte-Martin, 2015). Some patients may feel uncomfortable with expressing their thoughts and feelings about their illness, and some think Joanna Hargis art therapy can sometimes worsen those. However, Art therapy ultimately gives them a way to communicate with others, so people can interpret them and gain insight as to how they really feel.

In Dakar, Dr. Tabara Sylla uses art therapy along with medication to treat patients who have a wide range of mental disorders from depression, autism, to schizophrenia. She states that art therapy is a way for health care professionals to communicate with patients, when talking to them alone is ineffective. She says “ art therapy is a type of mental comfort that brings relief; the interpretive elements are visible in a patient’s work through repetition of images, colors and actions. A first drawing of a bird, for example, can be fairly banal. But, she says, if a patient continues to paint birds, then we can start asking key questions. This is especially useful with patients who do not speak but only communicate through images.” The key thing to remember is that art therapy helps people to uncover hidden emotions, and discover deeper psychological issues, which ultimately helps the patient understand what they’re going through. In 2001, an art therapy intervention

was developed by Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco General Hospital's to reduce acute stress in pediatric trauma patients. (Chapman et al., 2001).

Even though this art therapy program did not show a major effect when patients were discharged, children who had PTSD symptoms, showed a reduced number of symptoms during the follow up visits. As some may know PTSD symptoms are externalized form of overwhelming emotions experienced during the traumatic events according to the psychodynamic theory. (Malchiodi, 1997; Odell, 2011). Art therapy provides a safe environment where patients can express those overwhelming feelings.

Joanna HargisRequires an author, year and page #Joanna HargisAll authors are included in the first citationJoanna HargisThese authors are not listed on the reference page.

In another study conducted by Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg in 2017, 43 patients participated in art therapy while 36 others did not. Patients were asked to paint a picture of how they were feeling on that particular day and to reflect on it. These patients did this for ten 1 hour long treatments. After they finished conducting their research they found that the patients who suffered from severe or even moderate depression and participated in art therapy, found that those patients had improved on the 5 steps rating for depression. Patients expressed and exhibited being able to sleep better, reduced anxiety, and being able to be more socially involved, while of course those who did not participate showed no improvements at all.

Art therapy can even be beneficial for people with autism. One of the more difficult things that people with autism experience is the difficulty being able to verbal communicate and socially interact with others. Some struggle to form clear sentences, whereas some are literally unable to speak at all. They even have a hard recognizing sarcasm from a real genuine statement, therefore causing them to have difficulty understanding other's feelings. This is what unfortunately poses a barrier for them to communicate with society. Many people assume that because someone autism have troubles communicating, that they can't think clearly. However, they are intelligent and have amazing capabilities to think and visualize their world through pictures (Lisa, 2018). With this therapy, patients with autism sensory regulation can be less stressful for them when they engage in art therapy, the art gives them a way to focus working through and dealing with uncomfortable sensory experiences. When these patients utilize art therapy, we gain an insight as to how they see the world through their eyes.

People can even use different art materials to develop fine and gross motor skills, that can further help improve their sensory perceptions Art therapy can also be utilized with patients who have autism, by Joanna HargisMissing reference Joanna Hargis encouraging social skills. Some art therapists promote social skills by limiting art materials which encourages them to share, that helps them to be social with other people (Casey, 2018). Even though art therapy is beneficial for most patients, there are certain aspects that may pose certain risks to patients. Some may experience emotional discomfort from participating in this therapy, due to fear of unveiling

uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. Also, even if the patient and/or the care team feels as if the therapy would be beneficial for them, some insurance companies may choose not to pay for these services, because it is not considered a “ true” therapy. (Lesley et al., 2015) There are even some patients who express that they feel as if art therapy will not be beneficial for them, meaning it won’t help them get better by simply drawing or painting. Also, there are patients who think participating in art therapy is “ childish”.

More significant concerns of art therapy are the risks of the therapy causing the patient more anxiety, depression, emotional pain, and bringing up more negative feelings that weren’t resolved in the first place. Nevertheless, the patient may adamant about art therapy if they feel as if the art therapist is unskilled, or they may have fear of their negative symptoms returning if they stop the therapy. More consequences to using this therapy technique, is when patients do finally express their feelings through art, they may feel embarrassed to show others what they created, even their families, which can cause a barrier for family support. Art therapy may have its disadvantages however, art therapy should not be the primary treatment for someone’s condition. Rather it should be treated as a supplemental treatment along with other therapies like medications, group talk, etc. Lastly before people deem art therapy useless or ineffective, people should keep in mind the age and ability of the patient, like patients with impairments like brain trauma, or patients who have an organic abnormal neurological condition. Joanna HargisNot on the reference pageJoanna HargisAll authors are included with the first citation.

Some may feel as if art therapy to treat mental illnesses, is useless and may even cause conditions to become worse. However, I believe that with first understanding the severity of the condition that the patient has, tailoring the art therapy specific to the patient, along with using additional treatments, art therapy can be very beneficial for the patient. Without art therapy, patients are not given a way to express their emotions and thoughts with others. Keeping negative feelings inside can actually be very detrimental for someone who already struggles with mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, autism, etc. Not expressing these feelings puts the patient at risk for developing negative behaviors and thoughts like suicide ideations, anxiety that worsens, depression that worsens, displays of negative-dangerous behavior, and sometimes complications physically that can happen to the body, due to stress. Art therapy can improve the quality of life by helping the patient to visualize what their feeling, and can also help the patient become more socially active with others.

In conclusion, art therapy is something that can be very soothing for individuals who have a hard time expressing themselves when words fail. Rather than just talking about it to a psychiatrist or counselor, or keeping negative thoughts, frustrations, and feelings bottled in, art therapy will help patients let those feelings out. It is important to understand that people need support from peers, family, and healthcare professionals in order to deal with their illnesses. Sometimes people need a way of talking or getting things out, but do not know how. Drawing, painting, and creating is a way for some people

to show you what's really going on in their lives, physically, emotionally, and mentally.