

Can the arts have a positive effect on health?

A review of the medical literature,
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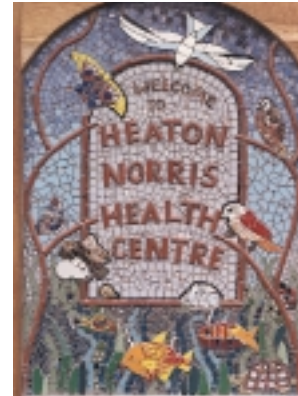
Arts in health: a review of the medical literature explores the relationship of the arts and humanities to healthcare, and the influence and effects of the arts on health. The report focuses on studies published from 1990 to 2004, looking at 385 papers from the medical literature.

The aim of the study was to add to and strengthen the evidence base, demonstrating the impact that the arts can have on health. Specifically, the findings highlight the importance of the arts and humanities on:

- clinical outcomes
- mental healthcare
- practitioners
- staff morale and job satisfaction

It also looks at:

- the effect of different artforms
- mechanisms of art perception



The effect of the arts on clinical outcomes

This review has identified a number of medical areas in which the research studies have shown clear and reliable evidence that clinical outcomes have been achieved through the intervention of the arts. For example:

- Encouraging people to attend cultural events has been shown to have a positive effect on blood pressure and hormone levels (Konlaan, 2000)
- Relaxing music has been shown to have a beneficial effect on anxiety, heart rate, blood pressure, immune response and pain perception (Knight, 2001)
- Rheumatoid arthritis sufferers who listened to 20 minutes of their preferred music daily reported a significant reduction in the perception of pain (Schorr, 1993)



Mental healthcare

The use of the arts in mental healthcare helps to increase the communication skills of mental health users, improving in their relationship with family and mental health providers. It also provides patients with new ways of expressing themselves, stimulates their creativity skills and enhances their self-esteem. Some of the findings this review highlights are:

- The introduction of arts into mental healthcare helps the patient to find ways of self expression and acts as a vehicle for establishing communication with other individuals (Killick, 1999a, 1999b, Allan, 2000)
- Painted wall murals have been used to decrease agitation in patients with dementia (Kincaid, 2003)
- Singing has been shown to increase the quality of life of people with progressive dementia (Clair, 1990, 1996, 2000)

Promoting better relationships between health practitioners and patients

This report also reviews the available evidence on the direct effect of the arts on health practitioners. It addresses the key issues emerging as a result of incorporating the arts and humanities into medical and nursing undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Interesting findings include:

- The relationship between medicine and arts, particularly literature, stimulates the insights into shared human experiences and individual differences, and increases the language and thoughts of the practitioner (McMellan, 1996)
- Literature is important in helping to develop empathy across gender, race, class or culture (Charon, 1995, Hunter, 1995)



Staff morale and job satisfaction

This review has also analysed a number of studies concerning job satisfaction, which include the following findings:

- The provision of works of art into the work environment has been recognised as having a positive impact on staff satisfaction (Ulrich, 1992)
- Introducing music into waiting rooms has been shown to reduce stress in patients, visitors and staff, which has implications for diminishing aggression against staff and increasing visitors' perception of the quality of service (Routhieaux, 1997)
- The study of the effect of colour and design on patients and staff shows that visual arts in therapy rooms induces positive psychological and clinical outcomes (Duncan, 2003)

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