CultureCase

Using art therapy to reduce stress in cancer outpatients

This research was conducted by **Rossana L. De Feudis** and **five others** at **San Paulo Hospital** and **two other institutions in Bari, Italy**

Summary

This paper describes the results of a study into the use of art therapy during a course of cancer treatment. We know that art therapies can benefit people in residential care or long-term hospital stays. This research tested the effectiveness of one-off group sessions for outpatients making short visits to hospital. Specifically, it investigated how it might reduce anxiety and distress. Almost 90 per cent of the patients receiving the art therapy said it had a positive impact on their wellbeing. They said it made them feel more relaxed and many welcomed the opportunity to do something creative and positive. Using validated psychological measures the study demonstrated statistically significant reductions in anxiety, drowsiness and fatigue in the treatment group when compared with a control group.

62 patients took part in one of 27 one-off sessions

These lasted 90 minutes and were held twice a week over a four-month period at the oncology outpatient unit of a hospital in Perugia, Italy. The sessions focused on ‘the production of spontaneous artwork; the eliciting of individual self-reflections connected to the artwork; a shared meaning-making within the group’. At the same time data was gathered from a group of 66 cancer patients at the same hospital who did not receive the art therapy.

There are many distressing aspects to dealing with cancer

The diagnosis can be a traumatic event, as can the experience of treatments, particularly chemotherapy. Stress and anxiety can generate harmful physical symptoms and may reduce the effectiveness of treatments. Art therapy in this format can help a lot of people deal with that trauma since it was shown to be appropriate for all ages, genders and education levels. The sessions were flexible and short enough to be delivered on site in a way that did not interfere with normal treatment schedules.

Keywords

wellbeing **Italy** **health** **control group** **anxiety** **art therapy** **stress**

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