CultureCase

The benefits of arts programmes for older people in acute healthcare settings

This research was conducted by **Karen Ford and three others** at the **University of Tasmania** and **Inscape Tasmania, Australia**

Summary

This paper is an account of an arts in health programme at an acute older persons’ unit in a general hospital in Tasmania. There is a well-established body of work that describes the many benefits of arts in health programmes. This study focused specifically on acute older persons' care (rather than, say, nursing homes) where the average length of stay is 12 days and many patients have dementia or delirium. The research found that ‘patients and families were engaged and enjoyed activities that aided recovery from illness; and staff also enjoyed activities and importantly learnt new ways of working with patients.’

The programme was conducted by a part-time arts health worker

They led activities like art making, bedside music activity and making changes to the ward. A main observation in the paper is how they improved the environment and atmosphere in the ward by redecorating with artwork.

The study is based on qualitative data

The researchers observed the art activities in person, as well as conducting four semi-structured interviews with patients and family members, and three focus groups with 18 members of staff in total.

The project helped staff gain a fresh understanding of patient-centred care

Because of the many complex needs of patients in acute wards, staff can often neglect people's mental and social wellbeing (including their own), and a patient-centred approach is not easy.

Keywords

interview **observation** **Australia** **health** **elderly**

Title	Art, music, story: The evaluation of a person-centred arts in health programme in an acute care older persons' unit
Author(s)	Ford, K., Tesch, L., Dawborn, J. & Courtney- Pratt, H.
Publication date	2018
Source	International Journal of Older People Nursing, Vol. 13, Iss. 2, e12186
Link	**https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/opn.12186**
Author email	**karen.ford@ths.tas.gov.au**

By **Culture.Case** | | **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |

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