Art and Hospice Care: Building a Strategic Relationship

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Background
Ever since Saunders’ inspirational philosophy, it has been recognized that hospices should be a place that offers patients, families and staff opportunities for discovery, personal growth and a new sense of wellbeing. Growing evidence is demonstrating how the therapeutic art and design offers, in a unique way, opportunities to support patients, family and staff as an integrated part of health care.

The underpinning philosophy of utilising creative arts, within palliative care is the belief that:

- Everyone can create something of meaning and value through creative arts, not only the few ‘talented’.
- A good quality of living includes artistic and creative experiences.

St Columba’s Hospice has demonstrated a commitment to integrate creative and decorative art into its day to day practice. Through an exciting collaboration with the art organization GINKO and Creative Scotland, a five year Art Strategy has been developed.

The process of writing the strategy

1. Literature review of academic research and best practice
   - This demonstrated, through research evidence and practice based projects, the positive impact that art and design has on health such as:
     - Enhancing adaptability and acceptance (Smith 2002)
     - Enhancing wellbeing and quality of life of patients, staff and visitors (Lawson & Phiph 2003)
     - Reducing symptoms such as fatigue and pain as well as stress (Nairns 2006; Palmer 1999)

2. A five month consultation period with the hospice staff, patients and volunteers included:
   - A series of one-to-one conversations as well as open drop in day, held with staff and volunteers.
   - An afternoon workshop for the hospice arts committee as well as a seminar day open to all staff and volunteers with a professional Edinburgh artist and representatives from cultural organisations.
   - A test workshop for day care patients with support from artist Alexander Hamilton whereby patients made cyanotype prints using plants collected in the hospice garden.

Implementing the strategy

The strategy proposes a programme of activities that will offer:
- An appropriate therapeutic engagement for patients, families and staff.
- A social programme, designed to bring the wider community into the hospice building and grounds. This will help to reduce stigma and to ensure that the hospice becomes an accessible, lively and interesting part of the local community.

What we will achieve with the strategy:
- Permanent public art elements for sensitive spaces enhancing a therapeutic environment.
- Space within the hospice exhibiting patients’ and artists’ work.
- Event programme attracting the public into the hospice.
- Therapeutic art as part of hospice activities for staff, patients and families.
- Long term partnership with arts organizations and link with the local professional creative community.

Sensitives spaces
Specific areas have been identified which will be developed with a commissioned artist.

Emerging artist scheme
A mentoring scheme for an emerging artist will be proposed in association with city institutions.

Exhibition spaces
Each ward corridor will be an exhibition space showing a rotating range of work made by patients.

Staff Project
A programme for learning and enhancing wellbeing through art will be developed by an artist for staff.

Social programme
Programme of events bringing together hospice users and the local community.

Partnership residence projects
Bringing together Edinburgh Creative Community and the St Columba’s Hospice community.

How will we know if/how this works?
Research evaluation will be undertaken of all projects in order to support further build up of the evidence base and evaluate impact.

References

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