

Scope of the Arts for Health

People all over the world are recognizing and utilizing the power of the arts to help create a healing environment, to bring refreshment and hope to patients, families, and caregivers, and to tap into the power of the arts to touch the spirit. The relationship between the arts and health has many different aspects. The NCAH Board of Directors identified and described the following seven:

- ◆ *Creating a healing environment through the arts*

The visual, literary, and performing arts and crafts are enriching the healing process by bringing restoration and relief to patients, visitors, and staff of hospitals, hospices, and other health centers. Examples include healing gardens, paintings in patient rooms; live music in lobbies and on patient units; poets helping patients and their families to put their feelings into words; music, art, and dance/movement therapists guiding patients in self expression; art that helps people find their way through large and confusing buildings.

- ◆ *Contributing to the healing process*

A) There are thousands of artists and certified expressive arts therapists working in all kinds of community and healthcare settings -- hospitals, rehabilitation centers, mental health facilities, hospices -- helping people do "soul work" through media such as music, dance/movement, words, paint and clay. The expressive therapist who is part of the medical team provides a holistic view of the patient and helps the team to understand the contribution the arts make in the healing process. Some expressive arts therapists are involved in research on the impact of the arts in healing. For example, music therapists have spearheaded research on measurable effects such as rapidity of recovery, amount of pain medication requested, and length of stay in the hospital when music is part of the treatment protocol.

B) Working on their own or through patient support groups that offer arts activities, people faced with life threatening illness or adjusting to a traumatic disability have found solace, strength, and affirmation by using the creative process to take an active role in their own healing.

- ◆ *Caring for caregivers*

For healthcare givers who live constantly in a high level of stress and who see illness and death daily, making art can be rejuvenating. Sharing their paintings or poems, singing in a group for patients or each other, moving expressively and rhythmically together can also bring a greater sense of cohesiveness to the work environment.

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- ◆ *Supporting access to the arts for people living with disabilities*

Working in outreach programs, day programs, and community arts programs, or one on one, creative arts therapists, artists, and educators provide arts opportunities for people with disabilities to facilitate creative expression, personal growth, and community inclusion.

- ◆ *Fostering healthy communities through accessibility to the arts*

Artists work with communities that have experienced trauma, such as Oklahoma City after the Federal Building bombing, to work through grief and loss and to celebrate their solidarity and support for each other.

- ◆ *Delivering medical care to creative and performing artists*

“Vocational arts medicine” is practiced when, for example, an orthopedist takes a special interest in the dancer's knee problem or the pianist's hand problem. Body therapies such as the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais can come to the aid of the performer both curatively and in the prevention of injury. For visual artists, organizations such as the Center for Safety in the Arts in New York City provide information on such things as toxic solvents in art materials.

- ◆ *Enriching the medical curriculum*

Both doctors and humanists debate the role of non-medical subject matter in the training of doctors, and no school of medicine as yet includes the arts and humanities in the required curriculum. Several major schools of medicine offer extra-curricular opportunities in the arts and humanities, and a for-credit art studio course has been offered for a number of years at Hahneman Medical Schools. The University of Virginia offers hands-on participation in an art studio for medical students. A program at the University of Massachusetts uses the arts to help students cope with death and dying. These programs suggest that in this arena of exploding technology, medicine does not need to become sterile and devoid of human elements, but is still, in fact, a rich blend of art and science. These programs are designed to help medical students and doctors who are seeking balance between the clinical aspects of medical care and the needs of patients, themselves and their families for tenderness and empathy.