Art therapies in cancer — A non-negligible beauty and benefit

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Art therapy is a powerful tool involving the use of artistic ways of expression for physical and mental healing as well as the improvement of perception and cognitive functions. Art therapies are used to face the existence of life and death in serious diseases such as cancer, and visually express certain deeply-hidden feelings, such as fear and hope, by stimulating the memory. Through art therapy, cancer patients can express themselves with no need for talent, when they fall short of words. The primary goal is to reveal the feelings of cancer patients and help them be happy: as psychoanalyst Jung says, “happy state is the creative state”.

1. History of art therapies

The initiation of the use of art therapies in the treatment of diseases dates back to the time of ibn Sina, who lived in the 1000s, pioneered the development of medicine, believed in (and used) the therapeutical power of music. In the Ottoman period, music has been used as palliative care and a treatment method for the psychological healing of patients with various medical conditions, and its significant benefits have been observed on patients. However, more recently Adrian Hill, a British artist and writer in medicine, defined art as “the enemy of diseases” in 1942. Once Hill began to carry out studies on the therapeutic aspects of art, he observed that the artistic practices improved the psychological states of patients and reduced their stress. He administered art therapy to tuberculosis patients for the first time in 1945. With that study, the building stone of art therapy was introduced. According to Hill’s approach, art therapy is intended to help treat psychiatric patients, mentally...
and physically disabled patients, cancer patients, and individuals suffering from physical discomfort.  

2. Art therapies intended for cancer patients

The intended uses of art therapies in cancer treatment processes include the psychological improvement of patients and their relatives, and te improvement of their quality of life.  

When we look at the historical process of art therapy, we see that different media are used, and that different techniques have been developed in accordance with each of these techniques.

Art therapy methods positively influence the midbrain, limbic system and the cortex, which are different parts of the brain.  

Three-dimensional sculptures, ceramics and installations works appear to contribute to the development of motor activities and movements.  

Using materials with different tissues and in different colors, sizes and forms for such works as much as possible increases the efficacy. These kinds of artistic activities performed with three-dimensional perception can help both support physical healing and contribute to psychological healing.  

Artistic activities involving the use of different three-dimensional materials provide healing by stimulating different feelings; and on the other hand, play an active role in increasing the awareness that is very important for cancer patients.  

Research studies show that the awareness-based therapy method supports healing in the treatment process of cancer patients, by targeting stress and other psychological disorders.  

Art therapies involving various techniques help cancer patients deal with problems that they commonly encounter, such as negative feelings and thoughts, stress disorders, chronic hyperactivity, problematic behavioral pattern, attention deficit and memory deficit.

For cancer patients, the form of expression that involves the use of other colors is one of the best ways to express their feelings.  

Art creation process enables the patient to both express his/her feelings and develop ideas.  

When patients do these, the power of colors supports their form of expression and also improves their feelings. Besides its important role at the conceptual and symbolic level, the colors also consistently improve patients’ ability to learn and improve some techniques, and solve analytical problems related to the process. This approach called conceptual and symbolic is not intended to ensure artworks to be aesthetic or with accurate dimensions and a conceptual thing in the most simple and pure way.

While they give meaning to works of art at this level, they improve some techniques, and solve analytical problems related to the process. This approach called conceptual and symbolic is not intended to ensure artworks to be aesthetic or with accurate dimensions and a conceptual thing in the most simple and pure way.

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