

Methods and Timeframe Benefits of Art Therapy on Cancer Patients

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Abstract—The article is a literature review of art therapy on cancer patients, focused on the method and the benefits shown in practice. We compare previous research of art therapy on cancer patients. Our aim is to explore the benefits of art therapy in term of timeframe. The research questions are: a) How the cancer patients feel for the benefit of art therapy, and b) When and for how long the patients feel the benefits of art therapy: is it only during the therapy or continue afterwards. Many researches explores the positive impact of art therapy to the cancer patient's psychological health. Art therapy had proven to help reducing depression, anxiety, and physical pain of the cancer patients. Previous studies have shown that psychological benefits last only during therapy, but thereafter there are indications of pain reduction in patients. Other studies have shown that there is a decrease in anxiety and depression symptoms over a longer duration of time. The implication of this literature review is to develop efficient and effective art therapy programs that focused on the benefits on the cancer patients, their caregivers, and medical staffs.

Keywords: *art therapy, cancer, therapeutic*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Art therapy had been used as complementary form of medical treatment for patients with chronic illnesses, including cancer patients. There are many researches that have been conducted on the art-based activity procedure and method, including the therapeutic benefits and efficacy to heal patients. Although it is still debatable on the art therapy efficacy of healing, there are significant proofs on the emotional improvements of patients of chronic illnesses. It is because art therapy provides a way of communication that might become a releasing canal for the patients to express their needs and wants in non-verbal manner [1].

The professional practice of art therapy have been gradually established in developed countries such as United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, United States, Canada, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia. It is considered as mind-body intervention which has therapeutic potential for the participant. Historically, art therapy practices were rooted from the science of psychoanalysis. Adrian Hill was one of the first who began studies on art therapy and laid foundation for the science in 1940s [2]. During the 20th century, researches had formerly

used projective drawings and analysed them to discover hidden truth [1]. This is possible because through the art therapy process, participants connect to their unconscious inner thought through the art-making process. Art therapy might reveal uncovered truth in the realm of the psyche through the use symbols, images, composition, even though media strokes [3].

However, recent trend show that the practices of art therapy tend to shift to a more expressive methods and procedures that unrestrained from the purpose of psychological assessments, while focusing more on the therapeutic properties through exploration of tasks and materials.

The use of art therapy on cancer patients, especially on undergoing treatment patients (both in-patients and out-patients) have been flourished in the last two decades. Researches showed that art therapy helped cancer patients to decrease tension, anxiety and depression. The patients also reported felt less pain after given art therapy [4].

Since cancer is one of the leading causes of death throughout the world every year, it is important to develop researches on art therapy focusing in this area. Cancer is a disease caused by abnormal growth of body tissue cells. In its development, cancer cells will spread to other body parts and cause death in sufferers. Cancer can occur in all age groups, including children. Cancer might cause physical and emotional imbalance condition on the patients. Few research even mentioned the loss of identity of the cancer patients. It is because of the struggle to be a cancer survivor usually put a lot of effort, energy, and time. Sometimes, sense of isolation and social withdrawal tendency are detected in cancer patients, especially children. Art therapy can help the cancer patients to reconstruct positive self-identity [4]. Art therapy is said to help reduce anxiety, depression, and physical pain in patients, and most patients also report a general improvement in their quality of life. Previous studies have shown that psychological benefits last only during therapy, but thereafter there are indications of pain reduction in patients. Other studies have shown that there is a decrease in anxiety and depression symptoms over a longer duration of time [5].

B. Purpose

The purpose of this article was to conduct an integrative review of the literatures that was recently published between

the last 20 years (1999 to 2019) to explore the benefits of art therapy in term of time- frame. Previous studies have shown that psychological benefits last only during therapy, but reported thereafter pain reduction in patients. Other studies have shown that there is a decrease in anxiety and depression symptoms over a longer duration of time.

The research questions are: a) What is the method or procedure used in the art therapy activity? What task, tools, and materials are used? b) How the cancer patients, the caregivers, and medical staff feel for the benefit of art therapy: during the therapy (and between sessions) and after the therapy ended.

The findings from the research are intended to provide suggestions to develop efficient and effective art therapy program focusing on the benefits of the cancer patients, their caregivers (family), and supported medical staffs.

II. METHODS

A. Integrative Review

This article follows Neuman category of literature review, namely integrative review [6]. Integrative review is a common type of review, in which the writer presents and summarizes the situation during the knowledge of a particular topic, gives a glimpse of the support and criticism of the topic. This review is combined with context review or may be published as a separate paper as a thought contribution for other researchers.

B. Search Strategy

Researches which we included in this review article were taken from academic, health science, and medical journals in English language. The database used was Google Scholar by using the word ‘art’ ‘therapy’ ‘cancer’ ‘patients’ as key concepts. We include all article discussing art therapy for all ages.

C. Analysis

After collecting researches, we began the analysis by creating a matrix which listed title, the conducted time (year), research objective, subject, art therapy methods and procedures (including task, tool, material used), and the benefit felt by cancer patients, caregivers or family, and medical staffs.

There are 11 articles collected for this literature review 10 articles were from developed countries, while only 1 was from developing countries. All of the subject research were cancer patients, consists of adults, adolescent; and children. Then we chose researches with objectives are divided into two main theme category, namely: a) exploring methods of art therapy interventions related to characteristics of the illness; b) exploring physical and psychological response and effect of art therapy on the patients.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Art Therapy: Task-Tool-Material

From the literatures, we found several main tasks were repeatedly used and the purposes they were intended to (see Table I below).

TABLE I. PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE AND TASK OF ART THERAPY

Purpose/Objective	Task
prevent or reduce anxiety and fear	medical play, dramatization
tension-release, reduce symptoms of depression	art activities involving expressive movement, such as watercolor or acrylic painting, finger painting
build self confidence, re-establish self identity	art activities exploring life meaning, creating symbolic expressions, following with discussion or talk.
self-acceptance	art with meditative approach, sharpening integrated senses through art appreciation activity

We also conclude that the art therapy methods should concern more on few important technical details below:

1) *Making decision/variety of choice to choose:* Cancer patients have limited options of what they can do daily. So it is important for them to have a sense of self-control, by choosing to do activity that they want to, also tools and media to use [7-9]. We suggest that in every session art therapists should prepare few different activities (differing the media type and use) for the patients to choose. In this way, patients could choose any activity they like and which they feel confident to do.

2) *Moving along with the phase of cancer journey:* Cancer evolve in three main phases: a) the beginning phase of diagnosis and treatment, b) during middle or maintenance phase of therapy, c) the following relapse or in advanced stages of disease with poor prognosis [8]. It is important to learn and adjust the art therapy according to those phases and the specific physical and psychological needs.

B. Timeframe Benefits of Art Therapy

We categorize the benefits into two main categories based on the timeframe and duration of the benefit felt by the cancer patients, caregivers, and medical staffs: the short-term and the long-term benefit. The short-term benefit are positive physical and psychological improvements which are reported felt by the patients during and short-after the therapy. While the long-term benefits are reported could have impact in psychological improvements that last longer or might lead to personal permanent changes.

From the literatures, we found that therapeutic art activities carried out on cancer patients can have two major positive impacts, which can be categorized as:

1) *Short term benefit:* Below are few mentioned benefits that are reported felt by the patients during and short-after the therapy:

a) *Emotional release:* Art therapy can be used as a means of expression to release hidden emotions that cannot be said in everyday life.

b) *Building self-confidence and strength:* Through the activity of art therapy, patients could increase the sense of their self-control and autonomy, so that it impacts on one's own strength.

c) *Creating distraction:* Art therapy can be used to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, including relief of pain through distraction [7,10]. Though the activity should be organized carefully so that the distracting effects created are mutual and effective for various situation of the cancer patients. However, one research uniquely stated their research created distraction differently using mindfulness based approach. The distractions were said to be created to reactivate meaning-making on the patients life [11].

d) *Help improving communication:* In the process can be packaged narrative methods that allow social interaction with others (mentors, families, therapists), so that patients feel accompanied and listened to [9,10,12-14]. The important aspect in art therapy activities is the practice of continuity, the existence of challenges, and achievement targets [15].

2) *Long-term benefit:* Below are few mentioned benefits that are reported could have impact in psychological improvements that last longer or might lead to personal permanent changes:

- Help to build self-coherence and personal integration. This benefit is related with the building the sense of self-confidence and strength, but defining a broader and deepen condition.
- Rediscovering life vitality and renewed sense of wholeness.

IV. CONCLUSION

The discussion shows that any creative and expressive tools and medias can be used to be incorporated in the art therapy procedure, as long as it is not forced into or done against the patients willingness. Various options of activities should be provided to keep patients mind busy and active. We found that purpose of distraction from pain and anxiety is often mentioned in researches which discuss short-term benefit. While in researches which discuss long-term benefit, the purpose are more likely to help patients facing the worst situation of their health issues. Art therapy in some ways affected people surrounded the cancer patients too, especially the caregivers (family). They felt the same positive energy came through the patients, therefore the care process become calmer and easier.

If it is possible, the art therapy activity should consider to include the caregivers, although their participation must previously approved by the patients. However, less impact found on the medical staffs, although they confessed that patients become cooperative during the medical intervention processes. Meanwhile, small children might sense the art therapy activities differently than older cancer patients, since they communicate and percept differently than adults and adolescents. Further studies is needed to explore the art therapy approaches for younger children.

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