



Art in Healthcare & Wellness Settings

Evidence, Initiatives, and Case Studies
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ARTS IN HEALTHCARE: A PROVEN BENEFIT, AN UNMET NEED

Art and its restorative powers have been vital in healing practices for thousands of years. The integration of art in care centres and practices date back as far as ancient Greek traditions. Yet in many places today, healthcare institutions often do not fully embrace the healing capacity of art – art may be seen as an “extra” and not an essential component of the healing process.

With care facilities as sites of healing—as well as sites of major moments in human life from birth to death—art plays an essential role. Even as medical technology advances, there continues to be a gap that medical science that cannot fill: an outlet for meaning, introspection, solace, and reflection that art can provide.

Significant research and initiatives have identified evidence of the benefits of art in health care settings. This Brief cites these benefits, noting positive health outcomes across key groups in the hospital, including patients, visiting family members and friends, hospital staff and providers, and the public.

Art galleries in healthcare facilities are uniquely beneficial in their ability to provide a calming space that is separate from clinical environments. However, healing institutions without art galleries can still harness the power of art through alternative methods—such as art installations in public and private spaces, programming or engagement strategies, and partnerships with local art museums and organizations. This Brief lists several alternative options to facilitate art engagement if in-house galleries are not feasible, and concludes with case studies of several notable art galleries and installations in hospitals and healthcare centres worldwide.

Across all examples, art has the ability to bring meaning, comfort, and renewal to healing, influencing positive health outcomes in ways that conventional medicine often cannot.

2. THE BENEFITS OF ARTS IN HEALTHCARE

2.1 KEY VISITOR GROUPS

There are many reasons to enter a hospital, from seeking care to visiting a friend to simply going to work. Art can benefit anyone and everyone in the hospital. Below are several potential and proven benefits of art and/or art galleries to four major groups in a healthcare facility: patients, visiting family members or friends, hospital staff and providers, and the public.

PATIENTS

- Art galleries can provide a calming space that is an alternative to clinical or sterile environments, while providers and services remain closely accessible in case of emergency.
- Art can enhance clinical outcomes, including a reduced self-reported need for pain medication, reduced blood pressure,¹ reduced pain intensity,² and a shorter length of hospital stays,³ among others.
- Art can reduce anxiety in patients who have stress related to their illness or their visit to the hospital or other care facility.⁴
- Viewing and engaging with art can foster a sense of choice, independence, and identity in patients whose agency can be limited during serious illness or due to the restrictions of healing routine. Choosing to visit the art gallery as a “destination” can also enhance this sense of agency.⁵
- For patients in palliative care and end-of-life situations, art can enable individuals to find meaning, comfort, and reflection in their experiences.⁶
- Visiting an art gallery in a hospital can distract patients from physical, mental, and emotional pain and discomfort, as well as mitigate boredom.⁷
- Art can improve the overall patient experience in a hospital or healthcare facility, including improvements in patient mood, satisfaction with care, and reduction of common frustrations in hospitals such as long waits or staff shortages.⁸

VISITING FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS

- Art galleries can offer a calming space that fosters reflection and solace and serves as an alternative to clinical environments for visiting family members or friends.
- Art galleries provide the opportunity for families or friends to interact and participate in an activity with an ailing loved one in a safe space that is closely accessible to care services.
- The presence of art in spaces around a facility can enhance wayfinding and mitigate the stresses of navigating large buildings with often confusing design.⁹
- Art can provide comfort and create a diversion from the suffering of loved ones.

STAFF AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

- An in-facility art gallery can increase the workplace morale of staff and service providers by offering a calming break space in close proximity to their everyday working environments.
- Art can enhance the workplace environment, leading to increased employee retention.¹⁰
- For providers and caretakers that deal with serious injuries, ailments, and death on a daily basis, the presence of art at the workplace can reduce stress and mitigate depression and fatigue.¹¹
- Art galleries in health care facilities can provide opportunities for education and training of the next generation of care providers in partnership with local colleges and universities, leading to an improved integration of the arts and humanities in healthcare.¹²
- Through increase employee retention and morale, the status of an institution can be elevated according to national reviews and standards (e.g. “Top 100 Employers” lists).

THE PUBLIC

- Art galleries in care facilities can be made accessible to the public if they are in close proximity to the main entrance and are distinctly separate from patient services and waiting rooms.
- Publicly-accessible art galleries can enhance a city’s global status by increasing its engagement with and promotion of arts and culture.
- A healthcare facility’s art gallery can increase its commitment to community service and volunteer engagement by hiring and training volunteers for gallery staffing.

3. OPTIONS FOR ARTS IN HEALTHCARE

3.1 ART GALLERIES

Art galleries can provide a uniquely transformative experience within the setting of a healthcare facility. A gallery is not simply a place that houses art: as a completely separate space away from the clinical environment, it can transport patients and visitors from the constant reminders of illness, injury, or grief to a place of respite and comfort.

This unique place of solace and comfort can also provide a non-denominational “sanctuary” for spiritual renewal and meaning, providing an alternative to chapels or synagogues often found in care facilities. Especially for patients and visitors who do not practice a religion, art galleries can be an important addition to increase accessibility and to welcome diverse groups.

A gallery space allows for complete and unified exhibitions. In contrast to individual works placed in isolation throughout a facility, a complete exhibition can provide a thematic continuity in a single space. This deepens the layers of storytelling and reflection that is possible through art. It also can provide a cohesive experience that further highlights the commonalities of the human experience. Gallery spaces also lend the opportunity for traveling exhibitions, allowing artists to showcase their work and prompting upkeep of the space. Additionally, it provides a location for other arts programming, including performances, lectures, and more. In effect, it increases the opportunity for more diverse arts engagement.

For the public, a gallery space increases the accessibility of art in healthcare facilities. While art placed in waiting rooms and private spaces can be beneficial to patients and families, the general public rarely has access to art in these settings. Publicly-accessible galleries can connect local communities to the facility and situate it more firmly within the community. Further, it can reduce fear around healthcare facilities and educate the public about an institution’s work and services. For example, the Earl Mountbatten Hospice in Newport, United Kingdom strives to make their in-hospice gallery appealing to both hospice residents and the public. In doing so, it seeks to bring together hospice users and the wider community, counteract “preconceived ideas of what a hospice does and what it looks like,” and “share good times” among the community and hospice users.¹³

These are several advantages for the unique presence of art galleries in healthcare facilities, though the benefits are not limited to the points above. Integrated in a care facility, the space and contents of an art gallery can transform the experience and effectiveness of healing.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE INITIATIVES

In some cases, constructing a distinct and separate art gallery is not feasible for healthcare facilities. Nevertheless, institutions still can engage their patients and visitors through art initiatives and installations. Below are several alternative options for incorporating art in healing practices.

Art Installations: Public and Private Spaces

Art installations and works of art can improve spaces and support positive health outcomes. Art in private rooms and clinical environments can provide distraction and comfort while awaiting or undergoing procedures. Art in hallways or lobbies can act as landmarks to orient visitors in large buildings with often confusing design. Overall the presence of art can humanize a clinical environment.

Programming and other Engagement Strategies

For care facilities that have access to works of art but no gallery space, the institution can engage patients and visitors by developing programming around the works of art. This could include but is not limited to: art carts in which volunteers bring art to patients and residents; events such as performances in public spaces like lobbies; or art therapy activities, in which patients are prompted to create their own art.

Partnerships with Museums and Art Galleries

When an institution does not have the staffing or resources to plan and execute art programming in-house, it can often turn to a local museum or gallery for support of collections, program development, and museum staff. In turn, the care facility can provide special training to museum docents or guides to enhance their understanding of particular patient needs.

Partnerships can involve “field trips” for patients to the museum or gallery, training for care providers in how to incorporate arts in their practice, museums that facilitate “art-making” activities, and museums loaning works of art to hospitals and healthcare facilities.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1 PERMANENT ART GALLERIES IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS



Works of art and interpretation at the Hennick Family Wellness Gallery in Mount Sinai Hospital.

Hennick Family Wellness Gallery

Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto

[The Star: "Sorel Etrog sculpture garden coming to Mount Sinai"](#)

A new gallery space on the first floor of Mount Sinai Hospital opened in June 2016 and features sculptures and a painting by renowned Canadian artist Sorel Etrog. The Wellness Gallery's indoor and outdoor spaces are free and open to patients, staff, and the public during hospital visiting hours. As a completely distinct space within Mount Sinai, it provides respite from the clinical environments of the hospital.

Read about our work with the Hennick Family Wellness Centre [here](#).

Buhler Gallery

St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg, Manitoba

[Gallery Website](#)

Established in 2007, the Buhler Gallery at St. Boniface Hospital recognizes the benefits of the arts in health and healing and its impact on the community. It features a permanent collection, temporary exhibitions, and concerts. It is open to patients, staff, and the public. The Buhler Gallery is the first hospital gallery in Manitoba, and one of only a few in Canada.

Art Gallery, Earl Mountbatten Hospice

Newport, United Kingdom

[Gallery Website](#)

The Earl Mountbatten Hospice art gallery is part of a wider “Social Programme” designed to open up the hospice facility to the community, encouraging residents and the public to interact and to dispel misconceptions and fear of hospice environments. It is also designed to improve quality of life in residents. The gallery features rotating exhibitions and events such as concerts and lunches.

Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection

RiverSpring Health, New York

[Gallery Website](#)

RiverSpring Health’s residential facility for aging residents, the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, includes the Derfner Judaica Museum. This 5,000 square foot exhibition space and member of the American Alliance

of Museums includes a permanent collection of Jewish ceremonial art as well as rotating temporary art exhibitions. Additionally, the Hebrew Home features an Art Collection throughout its indoor and outdoor spaces.

McMullen Art Gallery

University of Alberta Hospital, Edmonton, Alberta

[Gallery Website](#)

Open since 1986, the McMullen Art Gallery in the University of Alberta Hospital offers a space for patients, visitors, staff, and the public to view dynamic rotating exhibitions in a permanent gallery space. In addition to visual art exhibitions, McMullen also hosts in-gallery events such as concerts and sustains the Artists on the Wards (AOW) program, a free service that brings literary, musical, and visual artists to patients’ bedsides.

4.2 ART IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

Jeff Koons Installation

Advocate Children’s Hospital, Oak Lawn, Illinois

[RxArt: "Jeff Koons at Advocate Children’s Hospital"](#)

At Advocate Children’s Hospital in Illinois, a CT scanner and surrounding exam room are brightened by Jeff Koons’ iconic and kid-friendly characters, including Balloon Dog, Hanging Heart, and Donkey. According to Chief of Pediatric Radiology Richard E. Heller, the installation is “without question one of the most effective ways we have found to reduce the stress and anxiety around medical imaging.”

Art Collection at Cedars-Sinai

Los Angeles

[Collection Website](#)

Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles has more than 4,000 works of art in its collection, including notable artists such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, and Andy Warhol. The works of art are found in patient rooms, in hallways, and in waiting rooms, with the objective to create soothing, healing environments.

4.3 PROGRAMMING AND INITIATIVES

Art Cart and Art Walks

Baycrest Health Sciences, Toronto

[Collection Website](#)

[Art Walk Website](#)

Baycrest has several initiatives to engage its residents with its collection. The Art Cart Program enables patients to choose works of art for their rooms as part of an effort to promote healing. The Baycrest Art Walks, available at the front desk or to download as PDFs, promote exploration of art in the hospital and engagement with the art and loved ones.

Gifts of Art

University of Michigan Health System, Ann Arbor

[Program Website](#)

Established in 1986, the Gifts of Art program provides access to multimedia works of art for patients around the U-M Health System, including rotating installations, public concerts, in-room private concerts, arts and crafts projects, and an emerging “Dance for Parkinson’s” group.

4.4 PARTNERSHIPS WITH MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES

Denver Art Museum and Children’s Hospital Colorado Partnership

[Denver Art Museum Press Release](#)

In 2012, the DAM and Children’s Hospital Colorado launched a series of initiatives to spark fun and creativity for young patients, including on-site visits and talks from museum staff, hands-on activities, and a Family Art Cart.

University of New Mexico Hospitals Art Program

[Program Website](#)

To develop its in-hospital collections, the UNM Health Sciences Center Art Program has established partnerships with institutions such as the Albuquerque Museum and the UNM’s Tamarind Institute of Lithography.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Society for the Arts in Healthcare (SAH), "The Arts in Healthcare Movement in the United States Concept Paper," *Arts in Healthcare* symposium, March 2003, p. 4.
- ² Noble, G. and H. Chatterjee. *Museums, Health and Well-Being*. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. P. 21.
- ³ Ulrich and Lunden qtd. in Lankston et al. "Visual art in hospitals: case studies and review of the evidence." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 2010: 103: 490-99. P. 490.
- ⁴ Staricoff and Loppert qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 494.
- ⁵ Suter and Baylin qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 495; Noble and Chatterjee p. 7; NEA and SAH p. 5.
- ⁶ NEA and SAH, "The Arts in Healthcare Movement in the United States Concept Paper," *Arts in Healthcare* symposium, March 2003, p. 4.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹² Farnsworth, W. "Training physicians to be doctors, teachers and healers, problem solvers, and decision makers. *Journal of American Osteopathic Association* 91(10): 1005-108, 1991. qtd. in *ibid.* p. 49.
- ¹³ "EMH Art Gallery" and "Social Programme." Earl Mountbatten Hospice: <http://www.iwhospice.org/art-gallery.aspx> and <http://www.iwhospice.org/social-programme.aspx>. Accessed February 24, 2016.