

Art Therapy and Young Adults with Cancer: A Model for an Arts-based Support Group

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What is Art Therapy?

“Art Therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, colour, and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings may be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate.”

(Canadian Art Therapy Association)

personal fulfilment • self expression • coping with stress • life enhancement



healing • strengthening self confidence • creative freedom • satisfaction

Robert Pope, 1956-1992



- Painter
- Diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease at age 26
- "Illness and Healing: Images of Cancer"—published in 1991
- Died at age 35 (Murray, 1995)

Benefits of Art Therapy in Oncology



"Hug" by Robert
Pope

- Art making is empowering
- Self-efficacy, self-mastery, and self-awareness
- Fosters coping skills
- Allows expression
- Communication and understanding (Malchiodi, 1999).

Art Therapy Study

- Fifty patients with a range of diagnoses took part in study
 - Showed that art therapy can reduce symptoms cancer patients experience
 - Eight out of nine symptoms improved after one hour of creating art
- (Science Daily, 2006)



By Robert Pope

Young Adults

- On the cusp of autonomy
 - Have new roles, just beginning to be mastered
 - Honing interpersonal and social skills
 - Sexuality, intimacy, reproduction are important
- (Bleyer & Barr, 2007)



“Mountain” by Robert Pope”

Young Adults with Cancer

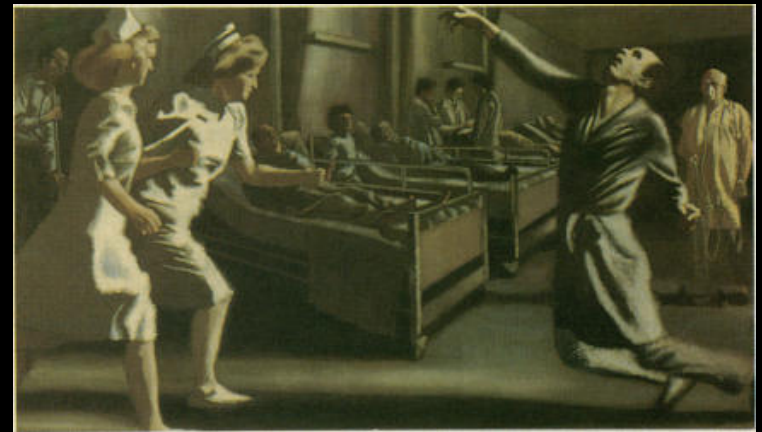
- In USA, 2% of cancers occur in people aged 15-30
- Diagnosis can impose dependence back on them
- Need for care is unique and more intense here than at any other time in life (Kelly & Gibson, 2008)



By Robert Pope

Problems Young Adults Face

- 15-30% of childhood and young adult cancer survivors are seriously psychologically troubled.
 - Problems they report:
 - delayed social maturation
 - mood disturbances
 - academic difficulties
 - career and insurance discrimination
 - increased health concerns
 - relationship problems
- (Bleyer & Barr, 2007).



By Robert Pope

Young Adults Benefit from Support Groups



By Robert Pope

- Groups have advantages over individual counseling
- Support groups studied quickly became comfortable with each other
- Support groups improve psychological well-being

Art Therapy Support Groups

In Art Therapy groups, members:

- share their experience
- support each other
- express grief
- use creativity to express feelings
- improve self-esteem
- achieve communication, socialization, and healing
- connect over the artwork

(Barry Falk,
Art Therapy and Cancer Care)



“Mr. S is Told He Will Die”

by Robert Pope

Models of Art Therapy Groups

“The Creative Journey”

- Support group for people with cancer
- Meditation and art activity focusing on inner experience
- Optional verbal and visual feedback (Luzzatto, 2000)

“The Healing Journey”

- Support group for people with serious illness
- Recognizes that illness puts people in a new place which needs exploration and integration
- Explores life changes, healing process, spiritual aspects of the experience
(Lerner, 2005)

The Arts-based Support Group for Young Adults with Cancer

- in-person support group, closed group model
- Four sessions: January 26- February 23, 2011

Approximate schedule of the group:

- 2:00-2:30- tea time, check-in, discussion of chosen topic
- 2:30-3:30- Art Therapy activity
- 3:30-4:00- participants share art and their experience

Eligibility/Referral criteria:

- BCCA registered patients
- Ages 19 – 35
- English speaking, or participating with an interpreter
- No art experience required
- Similar emotional needs to the rest of the group
- No history of serious psychiatric disorders

Advertising for the Program

- Posters
- CCS Cancer Connection
- YACN
- PFCS staff referred clients
- BCCA website

Effectiveness of the Publicity Strategies

- Posters were the most effective

Arts-based Support Group for Young Adults with Cancer

A pilot project for young adults aged 19-35



BC Cancer Agency

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority



Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00 pm

The group will meet every Wednesday afternoon for four weeks, Jan. 26, Feb. 2, 16 and 23, 2011

Each week, a different topic will be explored (such as identity, body image, finding meaning).

The group will be led through different art-based exercises and will be facilitated by an art therapist.

You are eligible to participate in this research project if you are registered with the BCCA and are between the ages of 19 and 35.

You may be newly diagnosed, undergoing treatment, or post-treatment.

Those present will have time to connect with other group members.

No previous art experience necessary.

By registration only

Place:

Look Good, Feel Better Room
Rm #548,
BC Cancer Agency,
Vancouver Centre
600 West 10th Avenue

For more information & to register call:

Sara Prins, Art Therapist
Patient & Family Counseling
604.877.6000, LOCAL 672184

Expected Outcomes

Participants will:

- find new ways of expressing themselves
- have new insight
- form connections
- feel empowered

Outcome measures:

- initial survey, final questionnaire
- art work, verbal feedback

Session 1:

- Focus: introduction, changing identity
- Art activity: mandalas



Session 2:

- Focus: body image and sexuality
- Art Activity: mixed media collage about body image and the idea of beauty



Session 3:

- Focus: spirituality, finding meaning
- Art Activity: Tibetan prayer flags



Session 4:

- Focus: sharing your story, seeking support
- Art Activity: self portrait as a tree



Characteristics of the Participants

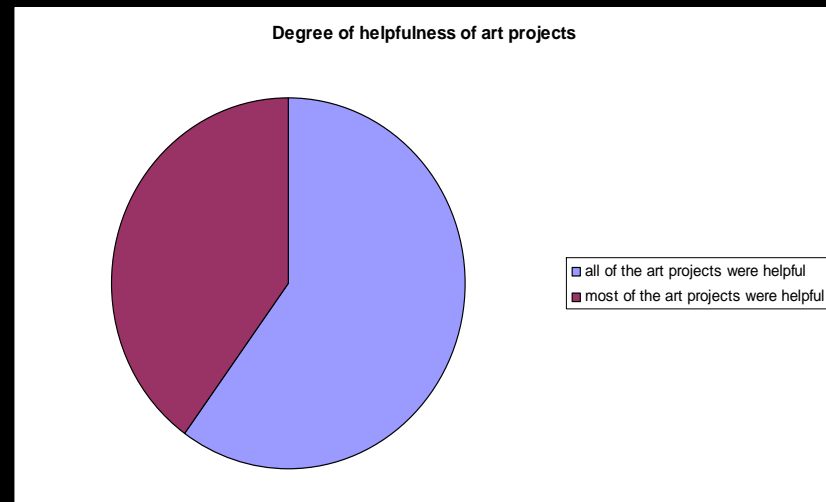
- Six participants (one left after first session)
- Aged 22-33
- Five females, one male
- Three participants were post-treatment
- two participants--in active treatment
- one participants--finished treatment during the group
- Five participants had been in a support group before

Results of the Study

100% of participants said that they found support in the group.

Items that participants found most helpful:

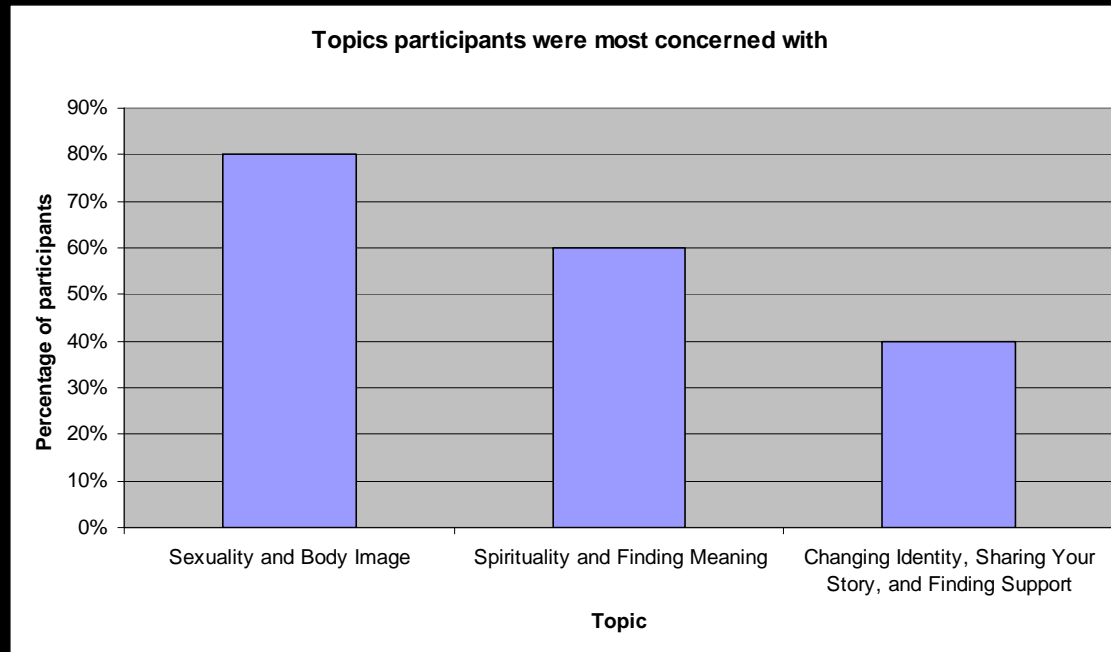
- sharing experiences and empathizing
- discussing topics and sharing art work
- self-reflection
- discovering creativity



Comfort Levels

- same level of comfort sharing experience in a support group before and after
- +20% shift in how comfortable participants felt creating art in a support group

Selection of Topics



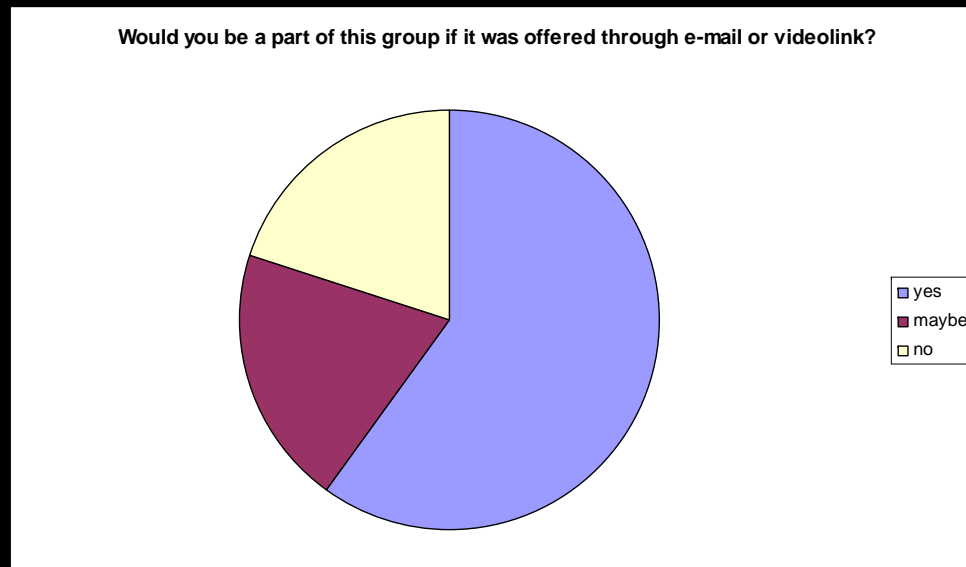
- Participants were most concerned with sexuality and body image
- Art activity and discussion on body image was the most helpful

Interest in Attending Another Arts-Based Support Group

100% of participants said that they would refer others to this group.

Their reasons:

- great experience
- personal expression
- sharing with and supporting others
- networking and feeling less isolated



60% of participants said that they would be a part of this group again if it was offered online.

Quotes from Participants

- “Hearing what others had to say sometimes sparked thoughts and ideas that helped me to understand feelings I have gone through myself.”
- “It is great to network and meet people who have had similar experiences.”
- “[I found helpful] sharing with others. Unleashing a creative part of my brain that is rarely used. Feeling calm for 2 hours every week and experiencing a chance to “play” with art.”

Recommendations From the Participants

40% of participants could not think of other topics to add. The others suggested:

- loss and grief
- fears and emotions
- returning to work and the future
- family
- age and cancer
- feelings around treatment

Participants ideas for improving the group:

- topics specific to the group
- less structured art activities
- using different art medium
- run group for longer period of time.

Plans For Further Development

A second Arts-Based Support Group will run this fall with these changes:

- topics chosen according to group interests
- eight sessions long

Next step: pilot project leading arts-based support group online

- group may meet online weekly, post art on to online forum

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Questions?



“Sparrow”

By Robert Pope