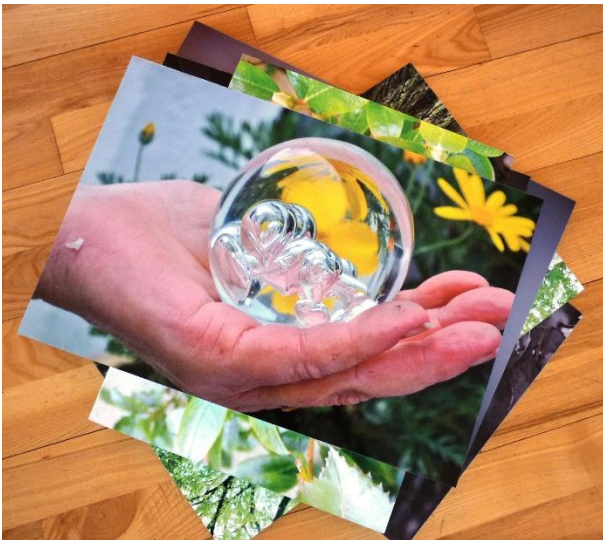


Executive Summary

An Evaluation of Waterford Healing Arts Trust Arts Programme in the Renal Dialysis Unit, University Hospital Waterford.



Reflection, Kate Quinn 2016

Leigh Tesch
2019

“No matter how hard she'd worked [in her life], she said, there's nothing like the tiredness of a dialysis session. Again, she wasn't a woman who'd say that lightly, and she'd said it several times... To have somebody then doing art, ... eases that immeasurably I would think. The fact that you could get some joy having to go through it ... And also when she came home she had something to look forward to and something to work towards.” (family member)



Entrance to Renal Dialysis Unit

Photo L Tesch 2018

Acknowledgments

In the course of collecting data for this evaluation, I had the privilege to meet with 41 people who were patients, family members or staff connected with the arts programme. Some people showed me their artwork, one sang me a song, others read or recited their poetry to me. I have read books that have been produced, viewed artworks and listened to many many stories about the people involved in this programme and what this involvement has meant to them. People have been incredibly generous with their time, and with their consideration and thoughtfulness about what this work is, was and could be. I am deeply grateful for their contribution and for providing me such a profound and personally moving experience.

Thank you to the patients, families and staff of the Waterford Healing Arts Trust and the Renal Dialysis Unit, University Hospital Waterford.

Leigh Tesch
Evaluator

Executive Summary

The Renal Dialysis Unit (RDU) in University Hospital Waterford (UHW) has partnered with the Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) to provide an arts programme for over 11 years. Two artists visit weekly to bring opportunities for patients to create art, to celebrate their achievements, and to develop skills and companionship. The arts programme has provided various exhibitions, launches, events and regular musical performances. In 2018 WHAT sought an independent evaluation of this programme, its purpose being:

1. To review progress made in the delivery of the programme from 2007 to 2018,
2. To analyse the artists' models of working, and
3. To make recommendations for the priorities and focus of the programme from 2019 – 2021.

The evaluator reviewed artworks and records, and carried out observations, interviews and focus groups with patients, families, staff, artists and co-ordinators. 13 current patients receiving haemodialysis, one past patient (a kidney transplant recipient) and family members of 3 patients now deceased were interviewed. Interviews were also held with 4 Renal Consultants, 2 WHAT Co-ordinators, 3 Nursing staff and 3 artists. 12 staff participated in one of the 2 focus groups (FGs). A total of 41 people and many more stories contributed to this evaluation and their experiences were recorded, analysed and summarised to produce this report.

The arts programme

The arts programme was established to provide patients (i) the opportunity to participate in art making, (ii) engagement with a trained artist, (iii) a high quality experience, (iv) a reduction in anxiety during their treatment, and (v) opportunities to develop artistic skills. The evaluation analysed the data collected through the interviews and focus groups and this provided a basis to understand how these aims had been achieved and what benefits have been experienced. The following themes were identified.

1. Coping with dialysis *"It helped him to just get through it"*

Being engaged with the arts programme enabled an experience of enjoyment, relaxation, anticipation and/or a focus on something constructive and achievable. Accessing this while undergoing treatment took *"the drudgery out of dialysis"* (FG 2), was a positive use of the time and provided a creative learning space that was meaningful for people.

2. Personal Skills and Confidence: *"I got a lot from it when I was on dialysis"*

Participants in the arts programme described the value of developing new skills, rediscovering existing skills and a renewed sense of confidence and mastery.

3. A transformative experience- *"I'm not this dependent chronically ill patient. I'm living with chronic illness, but this is who I am".*

Contributors described the arts programme as providing a transformative space – changing the chore and heaviness of dialysis treatment to a more expansive sense of self as an art maker and enlivening a more holistic view of the person beyond the role of patient.

4. Reflection and expression - *"it's a really powerful outlet"*

The programme brought opportunity to reflect and express through an artform.

5. A voice in the community *"it gives a great voice to the patients"*

The artworks created, and the process of arts engagement were reported as a powerful way for the patient voice and perspective to be heard.

6. Social connectivity – *"it's a different interaction"*

Positive social connections were built within the RDU, and externally with family and the wider community.

7. Legacy - “It’s something that I leave after me”

Family members, in particular, appreciated the legacy of the artwork created through the programme.

8. The atmosphere and environment – “the quality and human side of a hospital”

The programme contributed to “humanising”, “normalising” the RDU and creating a “quality” atmosphere.

Supports and Challenges

Factors listed below were key to supporting and facilitating the success of the programme, while other issues were challenging.

Supportive factors:

- The solid partnership of WHAT and the Renal Dialysis Unit
- Skilled and experienced artist practitioners
- The artist’s work is person centred
- The artistry values both process of art engagement and the products of the artworks created.
- Patients were encouraged by the support from their peers
- The nature of dialysis treatment ensures time and regular attendance to develop skills
- Patients gave personal commitment and participation
- The infrastructure and support from WHAT.

Challenges:

- Resourcing is limited, and this restricts how long and how many people can access the programme
- The medicalised environment can be challenging to work around
- The impact of illness, grief and loss can contribute to compassion fatigue and burnout
- Personal challenges can arise in this way of working for patients and staff
- Regular communication about changes and concerns on the unit
- Long term sustainability of the programme presents challenges in the current funding arrangements.

The Artist’s approach.

This report further explores the way artists work on the unit, acknowledging that these different approaches are valuable in maintaining both a width to its reach and a depth in the work. There are similar shared practices as well as specific techniques and strategies in facilitating an arts encounter.

Suggestions

Those who contributed to this evaluation made suggestions about how the programme might develop, expand, reach more people, and include certain activities such as peer led activities, art-based interest groups and artist led educational presentations and workshops.

Recommendations.

This evaluation clearly shows that in the midst of illness and limitation, the arts can defuse, deflect and reflect the patient experience. This evaluation recommends that the arts programme continues with long-term sustainability. Ideas for enhancing and developing the programme can be considered through careful strategic and creative planning. Supporting the artist’s practice and approach is vital for a quality programme. Systems to document progress and process of this work is important through consistent data systems and monitoring.

WHAT’s arts programme in renal dialysis not only offers a way to pass the time while undergoing treatment, but a reflective and transformative personal experience. It is to be commended and can inspire other Units and health care settings. “It’s not just a treatment. It’s something beyond a treatment here.” (staff)

The complete evaluation report is available through the Waterford Healing Arts Trust.