

BRIEFING PAPER:

Title: British Medical Association: The psychological and social needs of patients

Date: January 2011

1.0 Introduction

This briefing paper has been produced by Willis Newson. It offers a short summary of the key points made in the British Medical Association (BMA) research report, *The psychological and social needs of patients* published in January 2011. The report was prepared under the auspices of the Board of Science of the BMA and serves to highlight the significant role the arts play in meeting the psychological and social needs of patients.

Access the full report at:

http://www.bma.org.uk/images/psychologicalsocialneedsopatients_tcm41-202964.pdf

The BMA report makes a strong, evidence-based case for a holistic approach to patient care; one that addresses patients' physical, psychological and social needs. *'Helping an ill person back to better health requires due account to be taken of factors other than their physiology and anatomy; meeting psychological, social, spiritual and environmental needs are important'* (BMA, 2011, p.1). The report presents key evidence which supports the inclusion of arts activities in healthcare settings and the design of effective healthcare environments as having a significant impact on patient health and wellbeing.

2.0 Arts and humanities programmes

The report presents key findings from the growing evidence base that supports the use of arts programmes in healthcare.

Creative writing, storytelling and poetry reading

'The relationship between creative writing and mental wellbeing presents a promising modality for overall patient wellbeing' (BMA, 2011, p.9). Research has shown that creative writing and reading of selected fiction and poetry have therapeutic value for mental health service-users (Van Deurzen Smith, 1997). Storytelling has also proven beneficial as a teaching tool, affording doctors in training the opportunity of sharing experiences and developing emotional knowledge (Calman, 2000).

Music

'There is extensive literature on the effects of music in different healthcare settings, both for inpatients and for those attending outpatient departments' (BMA, 2001, p.10). Benefits to patients have included reductions in heart rate and respiratory rate for cardiac patients (White, 1999); increased caloric intake, weight gain and reduced length of stay for premature infants (Caine, 1991) and improvements in quality of life for patients with Parkinson's disease (Pacchetti, Mancini, Aglieri et al, 2000).

Visual art

'The visual arts have been shown to have a positive impact on patients who engage with them' (BMA, 2011, p.10). The introduction of visual arts to healthcare settings results in reduced rates of anxiety and depression (Staricoff, Duncan & Wright, 2003); improvements in physical and emotional functioning after stroke (ACE, 2006) and reductions in perceived pain and stress (Palmer, Kuhn & Taylor et al, 1999).

Theatre and drama

There is evidence to suggest that theatre and drama can be successful in alleviating communication, cognitive and social disabilities (Snow, Damico & Tanguay, 2003). Drama therapy has also proved to have therapeutic value for people with Dementia as an aid to self-expression and understanding (Knocker, 2002). *'Drama therapy responds to the deep psychological need of people with Dementia to express and understand their world'* (BMA, 2011, p.10).

Dancing

Research has shown that dancing provides benefits for patients over and above those associated with exercise more generally. Social dancing provides Dementia patients with an alternative form of communication and provides opportunities for increased physical activity, which has a number of health benefits both physically and psychologically (Hokkanen et al, 2003).

Singing

There is evidence to support the provision of singing for patients with Dementia. It can elicit attentional responses from patients even in the final stages of the disease (Clair, 1996) and has been shown to improve verbal communication, encourage patient collaboration during daily tasks and improve mood (Brown, Gotell & Ekman, 2001).

3.0 The physical environment and patient wellbeing

The report states that the healthcare environment has a significant bearing on patient outcomes, both physical and psychological. *'The architectural environment can contribute to the treatment of patients and significantly affect their health outcomes'* (BMA, 2011, p.11). Research has shown that poor design can have significant negative effects on patients including increased levels of anxiety, elevated blood pressure and increased analgesic use. *'Healthcare building and design should extend beyond functional efficiency, marketing and costs. It should promote wellness by creating physical surroundings that are psychologically supportive'* (p.11).

Exposure to daylight

Research has shown that exposure to light (daylight or full spectrum artificial light) can be effective in reducing depression and patient's length of stay in hospital. Studies have shown that assigning depressed patients to sunnier, east-facing rooms can have a positive impact on mental health (Benedetti et al, 2001).

Reduced noise

Studies have shown that noise can have significant negative effects on patients. Studies have shown that noise increases stress and raises blood pressure and heart rate in adults (Morrison, Hass, Shaffner et al, 2003; Topf & Thompson, 2001) and negatively affects oxygen saturation in premature infants (Johnson, 2001; Slevin, Farrington, Duffy et al, 2001).

Ward layouts and wayfinding

Research has indicated that long corridors between wards increase fatigue and stress in nursing staff and have a negative impact on the care received by patients (Hendrich, 2003; Ulrich, Zimring, Quan et al, 2006). Patients are often stressed and distracted when they arrive at the hospital site and effective wayfinding can have a significant impact on patient and visitor experiences of the hospital.

Single sex accommodation

Research suggests that providing patients with single sex accommodation can significantly improve their perceptions of the care environment (Maxwell & Sigsworth, 2009).

Social interaction

There is evidence to support the beneficial effects of social support in reducing patient stress and supporting recovery. *'Levels of social interaction can be increased by providing lounges, day rooms, and waiting rooms with comfortable moveable furniture arranged in small flexible groupings'* (BMA, 2011, p.13).

Nature and hospital gardens

Research studies continue to provide evidence of the benefits associated with exposure to nature including: stress relief, a reduction in anxiety, and greater pain tolerance. Hospital gardens have an important role to play not only in reducing stress and improving clinical outcomes, but also in providing a space for social interaction and escape from the clinical environment of the hospital (Ulrich, 1999; Whitehouse, Varni, Seid et al, 2001).

4.0 Conclusion

The report presents a quote from the European Charter on Environment and Health: *'good health and wellbeing require a clean and harmonious environment in which physical, psychological, social and aesthetic factors are all given their due importance'* (BMA, 2011, p.4) and this seems to sum up the argument the authors make throughout the report. There is a growing body of research to support the inclusion of arts and health programmes and the careful consideration of hospital and healthcare design as making significant contributions to patient recovery and wellbeing.

The report's key recommendations pertaining to arts and health are as follows:

- To adopt the Planetree model of patient-centred care, which highlights the need for healthcare environments to be welcoming, to enable patients to participate as partners in their care, to provide flexibility and personalised care and to foster a connection to nature and beauty
- To provide all patients with the option of participating in creative activities that are appropriate for their needs
- To create healthcare environments that support patients' psychological needs and promote wellbeing

The report provides an invaluable tool to support the field of arts and health and highlight its significant contribution to patient health and wellbeing.