

# Case Report on the Investigation of the Effectiveness of Painting Therapy in the Alleviation of the Symptoms of the Chemotherapy Process

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## ABSTRACT

Cancer is an exhausting, distressing, debilitating, and difficult experience for those diagnosed. Not only the obvious physical consequences, but also various psycho-social symptoms such as stress, overwhelm, nausea, pain, sadness, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, isolation, inability to carry out daily activities, impaired family communication, withdrawal, etc., reduce the quality of life and suppress the will and strength to fight. There are a number of studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of art therapy in the management of these symptoms in patients who have been diagnosed with cancer.

Art therapy is not a modern invention, but rather a universal method of therapy that dates back to the ancient world. It is defined as the use of various art materials to bring about positive development in individuals, resolve conflicts, reduce physical and mental problems, solve problems, provide diagnosis and treatment to help cope with stress. Its main purpose is to enable individuals to express themselves freely, enhance their creativity and showcase their aesthetic side while increasing their productivity. In all cultures, people of all ages and genders use art as a means of communication, as a healing tool for psychological and physical pain, to convey feelings, thoughts, experiences and beliefs, and to strengthen spiritual values.

In the literature review, it was reported that a wide range of symptoms were reduced in patients receiving art therapy, the time intervals between analgesics and antiemetics were prolonged, symptoms were greatly reduced, physiological and chemical activities activated by the creative process were improved, and better quality results were obtained when a solid data base was established. However, it has been reported that new, high-quality research is needed to determine how long the effects of this approach will last, which patients will benefit most, and what the long-term effects will be. Z. Şengül, a 58-year-old female patient with colon polyps for about 3 years and recently diagnosed with small bowel cancer, applied to the hospital for diagnosis and treatment. During the treatment process, the process of painting therapy was initiated under the umbrella of art therapy in the management of pain, stress and disease-related symptoms. For three days during her hospitalization, the patient was encouraged

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to paint with watercolors, which are considered freer and simpler than other types. Compared to the pre-therapy scales, there was a decrease in pain, nausea, anxiety, sadness, insomnia, and loss of appetite, and an increase in well-being. The patient's anxiety level was reduced from 38 to 28 on the Beck Anxiety Rating Scale. As a result of symptom relief, improvement in physical activity, increased willingness to take care of daily needs, and improvement in sleep patterns were observed. At the end of the process, it was observed that the patient's pain was significantly reduced and her attention and thoughts were distracted from feelings such as pain, nausea and restlessness. The patient stated that she would continue to use the art therapy method in symptom management after discharge.

**Keywords:** Cancer, Art, Therapy, Painting

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## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines cancer as a generic term for a large group of diseases characterized by abnormal cells that grow beyond their normal limits, invade adjacent parts of the body, and/or spread to other organs. (2) Cancer can occur anywhere in the body; it can start in any cell or tissue in the body. It can affect young and old, rich and poor, women, men and children. Cancer takes a tremendous toll not only on patients, but also on their families and communities. People diagnosed with cancer and undergoing chemotherapy begin a process that can be physically, emotionally and spiritually challenging. In the process, patients must deal not only with the disease, but also with the anxiety, fear, sadness, and a host of challenging side effects of the disease and treatment. Symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and pain make it difficult for people to perform even daily activities, while physical changes such as hair loss, loss of healthy skin appearance, tissue damage, and rapid weight loss negatively affect self-esteem and psychological well-being. The person may have to take a break from work, social life, family roles, and isolate him/herself from the things he/she loves, produces, enjoys, and is happy about. The prognosis, treatment and toxicity of cancer have significant local and systemic effects on all systems of the body. There are many traditional and medical complementary therapies that have been practiced, developed, and proven effective for symptom management in oncology patients experiencing these symptoms. One example is art therapy. Art therapy is an ancient practice that promotes communication, self-expression, relaxation, and inner healing for people of all cultures, ages, genders, and races. There is a growing body of research showing that art therapy can help people cope with the challenges of cancer and its treatment, and adapt to stressful traumatic experiences. Art therapy can help reduce stress by allowing participants to focus and redirect their thoughts from their

illness to a positive, creative activity. By strengthening the coping mechanisms of patients diagnosed with early-stage Breslow's cancer, it demonstrated how art therapy can help control their symptoms, increase their self-confidence, restore their productivity, and improve their well-being. Art has been a part of social life since the earliest times. Birth, death, marriage, harvest or crop ceremonies, religious, spiritual and physical healing rituals have been intertwined with art. The term art therapy was first used in 1942 by the artist Adrian Hill to describe his work with tuberculosis patients at the King Edward VII Sanatorium, where he discovered that painting was not only a way for patients to pass the time, but also a means of expressing their fears and traumas. (1) Art therapy has been used in the treatment of cancer patients since 1978. There are many examples of art therapy in symptom management of oncology patients in the world. (2) Painting therapy is used as part of cancer treatment at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. Patients are supported to manage their emotional expression and stress through painting. Research conducted at the center has shown that painting therapy improves the quality of life of cancer patients and reduces anxiety levels. Maggie's centers throughout the United Kingdom provide support services for people with cancer and their families. Art therapy programs are organized at these centers. Through painting, patients have the opportunity to express and process their emotional difficulties related to cancer. Maggie's Centers states that painting therapy increases the emotional resilience of cancer patients and helps them cope with stress. (3) The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne offers painting therapy programs for oncology patients. (4) These programs are designed to help patients cope with the psychological challenges they face during treatment. There are many techniques in painting therapy, such as free painting, guided painting, collage, mandala painting, group painting. Among these techniques, the most appropriate one is chosen.

## CASE

In this case, a 58-year-old female patient diagnosed with duodenal cancer, with no known allergies or substance dependence, and with a family history of only her father being diagnosed with lung cancer, underwent chemotherapy and was hospitalized at our clinic due to the symptoms she experienced afterward. In this case, the goal was to evaluate the effect of art therapy on symptoms of pain, anxiety, nausea, and fatigue. For symptom management, medication was limited in consultation with the primary care physician and art therapy was used. The watercolor technique was used in the study and different colors, patterns and reference patterns were used to reflect the person's feelings and thoughts. During the application, the participant was provided with a quiet and serene environment where he/she could hear the sound of music and classical music was played. Analgesic and antiemetic hours were arranged and analgesic and antiemetic treatment was not administered without the patient's request in consultation with the primary care physician. The patient reported fatigue, pain and nausea, anxiety, tension and sometimes irritability, decreased appetite and disturbed sleep patterns. On the 3rd day of admission to the clinic, the participant was provided with the necessary materials, explained the techniques at the beginner level and accompanied during the practice. The "Edmonton Symptom Rating Scale" was used to measure the patient's symptoms, the "Beck Anxiety Scale" was used to measure anxiety levels, and the "Visual Analog Scale" was used to assess pain levels. The painting therapy session lasted 3 hours. Before the session, the patient gave 6 points for pain, 4 points for nausea, 8 points for fatigue, 6 points for sadness, 9 points for anxiety, 9 points for insomnia, 6 points for anorexia, and 2 points for feeling well on the Edmonton Symptom Rating Scale. When she was asked about shortness of breath, changes in the skin and nails, and other symptoms on the Edmonton Symptom Rating Scale, she gave a score of 0 for each of them. On the Beck Anxiety Scale, 38 points were calculated. At the end of the first hour of application, she gave 6 points for pain, 7 points for fatigue, 4 points for nausea, 5 points for sadness, 7 points for anxiety, 8 points for insomnia, 6 points for anorexia, and 4 points for feeling well. On the Beck Anxiety Scale, 30 points were calculated. At the end of the second hour of application, 5 points were given for pain, 6 points for fatigue, 3 points for nausea, 2 points for sadness, 5 points for anxiety, 7 points for insomnia, 6 points for appetite, and 6 points for well-being. Other symptoms did not change. On the Beck Anxiety Scale, 25 points were calculated. At the end of the 3rd hour of application, she scored 7 points for pain, 6 points for fatigue, 4 points for

nausea, 2 points for sadness, 4 points for anxiety, 7 points for insomnia, 3 points for anorexia, and 8 points for feeling well. A score of 20 was calculated on the Beck Anxiety Scale. There was no change in other symptoms. A score of 30 was calculated on the Beck Anxiety Scale. The patient did not request any analgesic or antiemetic medication during the therapy process. The participant's average pain within 3 hours was calculated as 6, nausea as 3.7, sadness as 3, anxiety as 5.4, insomnia as 7.3, anorexia as 5, and well-being as 6. There was a decrease in pain, nausea, anxiety, sadness, insomnia, and loss of appetite and an increase in sense of well-being compared to the pre-treatment scales. The patient's anxiety level was reduced from 38 to 28 points on the Beck Anxiety Rating Scale.

## DEBATE

In terms of literature, Nainis et al. conducted a study of 55 cancer patients and found significant reductions in pain, fatigue, and anxiety levels after art therapy sessions. (5) In a study conducted by Forzoni et al. with 54 patients, it was reported that art therapy was effective in the management of the symptoms of the patients. (6) Juan et al. reported that art therapy relieved symptoms such as pain, nausea, and agitation in a study of 495 patients. (7) Bosman et al. reported that art therapy is likely to help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and improve quality of life in adult cancer patients, but because of the heterogeneity of interventions and the limited methodological quality of the studies, more research using rigorous methods is needed. (8) Studies show that art therapy improves patients' emotional and psychological health and provides an emotional outlet during the treatment process. Art therapy has also been shown to be effective in reducing psychosomatic symptoms in cancer patients. Research shows that this therapy has a positive impact on both physical and emotional symptoms, making the treatment process more comfortable for patients. In particular, group therapy can increase social interaction among patients, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. As a result, patients' morale and positive outlook on their treatment increases. In this case, the participant stated that after the painting therapy, her focus on pain decreased even when she was in pain, her feeling of anxiety and fatigue decreased, she felt a significant decrease in the level of nausea, she felt better, she fell asleep at a reasonable hour the day after the therapy, and she felt more rested and calm when she woke up. She has expressed a desire to continue her art therapy after she is discharged from the hospital.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this case report with a single participant, it was concluded that painting therapy provided a reduction in

pain, nausea, fatigue, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and stress levels in symptom management. Most studies have been conducted with small sample sizes and limited duration. Therefore, larger and long-term studies are needed to better demonstrate the full effects of art therapy on cancer patients.

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