



November 10, 2011

## The arts: Good for what ails you

Creative atmosphere helps hospital patients in the healing process

by Celeste Lewis

**Lexington, KY** - The University of Kentucky Albert B. Chandler Hospital is delving deep into the concept of the healing nature of art. The minute you enter the new patient care facility, you know you are in for something different.

Comfortable sitting spaces invite you to relax. Paintings and sculptures are placed throughout, and natural light floods in from the atrium windows. For added music, there's a large piano — wait, this is a hospital?

You won't find the stereotypical hospital look, smell or feel here, and the fear factor is mitigated substantially by the art-filled environment throughout the facility. This is a long way from institutional gray walls and tables piled with old magazines. If you dread the hospital, prepare to be forever changed — for the better.

Care has been taken to institute healing arts innovations in every area of the hospital to create the perfect environment in which to combine the art and science of medicine. Landmark studies in the field of arts in health care have been conducted over the past decade. Integration of the arts, including literary, performing, musical and visual arts and design, into the health-care experience provides great benefits, positively affecting patients' overall health outcomes and treatment compliance. It also positively affects the workplace for employees of the medical center, not to mention providing the community with a medical and arts epicenter. Data shows patients require shorter hospital stays, need less medication and have fewer complications, which all equals reduced health-care costs. Additionally, the high cost of recruiting medical professionals is steep, and staff retention becomes a high priority. Hospitals that have rich, well-rounded healing arts programs receive high marks in this regard.

In recent studies, when asked why they invest in the arts, 79 percent of medical facilities cited benefits to patients and the desire to create an environment to promote healing and recovery as their main reason. Data also revealed that health care and healing-arts programs serve diverse populations, with health care being a great common need for us all. These programs do not serve any one group, in terms of ethnicity, geography or socio-economic status, more so than others.

The effort to bring this to fruition at Chandler Hospital is evident as one tours the buildings that make up the UK HealthCare complex. The Kentucky Wall is a popular stop, as beautiful photographs collected from around the state show off the local landscape in a long hallway that features an interactive, ever-changing montage. People often report seeing a neighbor's farm or a familiar promontory depicted. There are two dedicated gallery spaces and many locations that feature an amazingly diverse collection of art.

Dr. Michael Karpf, executive vice president for health affairs and the driving force of the hospital's healing-arts program, explained, "The arts enhance the healing environment, but they also invite people to visit the hospital when they are well. If patients and families are familiar with the hospital, they will feel more comfortable in a time of need."

Jackie Hamilton, director of arts and health care, agreed. In implementing



The lobby of the Ben Roach Building at the Markey Cancer Center houses Helene Steene's painting "Shimmer at the Edge." photo by: Don Ament.

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Jackie Hamilton, director of arts and health care, agreed. In implementing the program, she has created an atmosphere in every patient room, hallway, atrium, nursing station, waiting and treatment area that uses the power of art to promote healing, stress relief and comfort, and it is all accomplished with private funding, grants and donations.

"We started with a committee formed of arts professionals and community leaders. We created a mission and began to put down the bones of what this program could be," Hamilton said. "We worked closely with the architects to begin to identify the best spaces to provide healing arts for everyone here. We started with the visual arts because we had the walls and spaces to start with, but it continues to expand with music and performance arts."

Lori Gooding, director of music therapy, is working with UK with an eye toward creating a master's degree program in music therapy, of which the hospital will be an important partner. The hospital received a grant for a music-therapy program and has in the works plans for individual music therapies and larger-scale music programs for the facility that can be attended by patients and their families or broadcast to their rooms. The Lucille Caudill Little Auditorium is a venue designed for everything from grand rounds and medical education to a performance of music or ballet.

Patients also have the opportunity to engage in art by their own hands. A new pilot program called Take An Art Break has been rolled out, in which patients undergoing cancer treatments at the Markey Cancer Center will be given materials to make art.

"It is a way of expressing what you're going through and helps you to feel more like a full human being and not just the person with IV lines, drains and lab values," said patient Linda Angelo.

Ann Smith, chief administrative officer at Chandler Hospital agreed. "Having a creative outlet at this time, in treatment, allows an expression not easily conveyed verbally," Smith said. "Art gives us a chance to express pain, uncertainty, fear and even anger and still provides a sense of peace and sharing. I am thrilled we can offer patients this type of emotional care."

Local artist Helene Steene completed a large piece titled Shimmer at the Edge for the lobby of the Markey Cancer Center. Measuring six feet by nine feet, the piece has a commanding presence in the entry and begs for a closer look when viewers recognize that, in addition to a colorful palette, there are also many textures and shapes that make up the whole. Many different media are used. Sand, wood, metal, oil, dry pigments and marble dust are all components of the abstract landscape, referencing the sea and the sun.

"This piece is about rejuvenation and the power of nature to help us heal," said Steene. "If my work can slow someone down to contemplate something within themselves, I feel I have reached them with my work. I hope to add a moment of focus to bring them inner peace in a stressful world."

Steene, originally from Sweden, has traveled and shown her work extensively around the world.

"I am so happy to be part of the hospital's program. It is very a collaborative process. I met with doctors, staff and board members of the Markey Cancer Center. I agree with their mission, and I believe that art can be a powerful part of healing," Steene said.

Steene's been drawing and painting since she was a child and grew up to have a true passion for art.

"I am in awe of the power of nature, and a lot of my work is inspired by that," Steene explained. "My work involves a lot of layering of translucent oil glazes over marble dust mixtures and sanding and reapplying, much like the layers of the present and the past I encounter in Greece."


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reapplying, much like the layers of the present and the past I encounter in Greece."

Careful attention to the architectural details of the entry space of the Markey Cancer Center was considered when creating Shimmer At The Edge. However the artist is quick to add that her main wish is to "reach the patients, family and staff that spend time here and to hopefully offer some joy and serenity."

"I have received feedback from people who have viewed my piece, and I have seen firsthand throughout the hospital the amazing effect of art," she said.

The title Shimmer At The Edge, according to Steene, refers to "observations of the magic that happens when the edge of color, line and form meet, much like the magic that can occur when individuals meet and connect and support each other."

Just like what happens in this healing environment every day.

 [View images.](#)

#### **Reader Comments**

**November 11, 2011 | 09:16 AM**

Thank you very much for a thoughtful and well written article, and to all who understand the power of art in the healing process... .

*Helene Steene*

**November 11, 2011 | 09:23 PM**

Durn , I can't copy and I can't paste AND i CAIN'T spell neither and apparently 'cause i think a tiger is a cat I am maybe a robot. But I made it so all is well.

Thank goodness for ART. and Thank you Helene for an exciting image that will bring a spot of joy to what is often too much depressing greens and grays and " I don't want to be here's" with the sounds of sirens in the background. And bravo to Chandler Hospital for caring and for looking at home in the Lexington Community to make it happen. Great Job!

*Michael Jaskwhich*