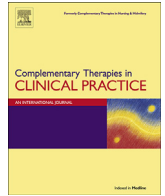




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## The oasis project, exploring the concept of reducing anxiety & stress in a hospital setting



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### ABSTRACT

Comments written in a prayer book in a hospital Chaplaincy Centre, about the area being a 'quiet oasis' in the middle of a busy hospital amid lots of anxiety and stress led to a focus group forming to explore ideas on how this could be addressed; a short term vision was the creation of an area (Oasis) in the Chaplaincy centre and longer term in other areas across the whole hospital. These areas would have an ambience of calm and relaxation where the use of colour, sound, aroma's and touch would be used to help in the reduction of stress and anxiety, this may be from forthcoming surgery, procedures or life in general from traumatic circumstances. The potential impact of this would be to aid recovery, potentially reduce other stress related illness and improve general well-being using strategies to include relaxation, breathing and visualisation techniques and aromatherapy hand massage.

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### 1. Introduction & background

The concept of the Oasis Project evolved from comments written in the 'prayer book' in the Chaplaincy Centre at the George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust. The book is for receiving comments and requests for prayers from users of the service, one such comment mentioned the area being a '**quiet oasis**' in the middle of a busy hospital and amid a lot of anxiety and stress.

Thoughts turned to how such anxiety and stress could be addressed and what could be done to help, from this a focus group was formed and Oasis was born in 2010. The aim of the project was to create space within the hospital setting and eventually into the wider community. The initial pilot was agreed and space to be allocated in the Chaplaincy Centre due to the ambience of calm and relaxation it already elicited. Incorporated into this existing area would be the use of relaxing reclining chairs surrounded by portable screens, colour in the form of towels, sound, aroma's and touch to reach the senses of the client.

The potential impact of this project would be to aid recovery from illness or surgery and potentially reduce other stress related illnesses [1] and to improve general wellbeing using strategies to

include relaxation, breathing and visualisation techniques with the addition of aromatherapy hand massage.

The project is run by volunteers multidisciplinary in format at the time of this audit there were approximately 22 on the team. Consisting of the Chaplaincy Manager as the lead, chaplaincy lay visitors (many ex health professionals), midwives, and nurses from theatres, pain clinic, the COPD clinic, a health visitor, a retired hospital director, therapists, an occupational therapy student and a member of the hospitals communication team, each member has a role within the team. Those not employed by the hospital have to go through the volunteer recruitment process via the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who carry out enhanced disclosure checks and induction programmes. All volunteers had undertaken by distance learning a Professional Relaxation Therapy Diploma awarded by the School of Natural Health Sciences [20] [www.naturalhealthcourses.com](http://www.naturalhealthcourses.com) and Aromatherapy Hand Massage training in house by the clinical lead of the project to ensure a consistent approach, this was adapted to suit our model of care and additional support and training is given from the Clinical Psychology Department. All volunteers are insured by the hospital trust.

The pilot project is funded entirely from charitable funds and fundraising efforts and donations because there was no funding from within the NHS to launch it, although it is supported by the senior management of the hospital Trust Board, there are no charges to the clients for the Oasis session, although a number of clients volunteered to give donations.

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## 2. Perceived benefits

### 2.1. To the client

- Promote relaxation and reduction of anxiety and stress [2].
- Introduce clients to self-help strategies for situations causing anxiety
- An increase in physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing
- May help prevention of stress related illness
- Involves the client in their own healthcare [3].

### 2.2. To the NHS trust

- Calmer more relaxed clientele accessing all services
- Potential quicker recovery, shorter hospital stays resulting in reduction of costs and positive financial impact
- Potential reduction in readmissions
- Potential impact of calmer staff and reduction of complaints
- Integrated healthcare-positive impact, innovative creative approach to healthcare [3].

## 3. Methods

The project was a pilot service agreed and supported by trust management therefore did not require ethical approval. As part of the Trusts Audit Department results will be presented to an audit day which occurs every 3 months.

The audit period was from January 2013 to January 2014, volunteers who were qualified led the sessions and trainees were supported.

The inclusion criteria for clients to access the service were those experiencing acute or chronic anxiety or panic attacks, those with general nervousness or apprehension regarding a treatment or procedure that they were coming into hospital to undergo.

Those excluded from the service were clients that had mental health issues (though they would be signposted to appropriate services), and clients the volunteer deemed them to be unsuitable for the therapy/project.

Caution was taken with clients who had skin conditions and clients who were pregnant in regards to the aromatherapy blends.

### 3.1. Referral system

The initial pilot study recruited pre-operative clients accessing the Day Procedures Unit to elicit data that would show effectiveness from a qualitative and quantitative aspect, plus included were other appropriate clients from other clinical areas.

The staff in the day procedures unit and other referrers would have a flow chart of ideal candidates to whom they would offer the service, via a referral form. A leaflet outlining the service would be given to the client along with a medical questionnaire and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) form [4]. The referral and returned forms would then be scrutinised by the clinical assessment lead on the team, as to their suitability for the project they are then contacted via a dedicated Oasis team mobile phone and offered a session.

Clients can self-refer onto the project if they feel it will be beneficial to them, those clients self-referring would complete the forms on the day of the session, but would verbally be assessed via the telephone to check initial suitability.

The HADS form has a series of questions about different aspects/situations in everyday life; these questions are scored on an anxiety or depression level. This gives valuable information as to whether

the client is suffering from an anxiety state or whether there are concerns about mental health issues, the latter aspect being out of the remit of the Oasis Project.

Rather than reject these people there is a system to offer referral to other services if desired. This protects the client from receiving inappropriate help and the volunteers from taking on issues and problems that would impact on their own health.

The medical questionnaire outlines any medical issues/medication and lifestyle of the client, they are asked to complete this to ensure there are no contraindications.

For pregnant clients liaison with a midwife team member will occur to ensure there are no contraindications [5].

All documentation is securely stored and staff and volunteers are bound by the hospitals confidentiality protocols. Clients were also asked if they would complete an anonymous audit form as part of the pilot study/evaluation of the project to ensure efficacy.

### 3.2. Session format

1. At the beginning of the session the client is welcomed and introduced to the environment, the process is explained and documentation checked for accuracy and if there are any additions or changes.
2. They are seated in the reclining chair and offered a hand massage with their chosen blend. Essential oils were selected which would be suitable for a variety of clients and that would complement the techniques to enhance relaxation and reduction of anxiety and stress.

Rather than blends for specific emotional or physical states, six blends were formulated and labelled as Blends 1–6 with essential oils they contained. The client would smell each blend and choose which one appealed to them the most, it would be noted which ones were chosen.

The essential oils chosen were blended in grapeseed carrier oil to a 1% dosage and are:

If someone is allergic or does not wish to have one of the blends a plain grapeseed base can be used as an alternative.

- 3 After the hand massage the armchair is reclined and music is introduced into the background this is checked with the client to ensure that it's agreeable. Breathing techniques are then taught to raise their awareness of how they breathe, so that they concentrate on this as well as sound around them and the area their body is in contact with, we call it breathing through the senses. This leads into the relaxation exercise as they utilise their breathing and focus on the body, carrying out a relaxation sequence raising their awareness on where tension is held in the body and how to release it with the exhalation breath.
- 4 We then introduce a visualisation, a virtual journey in the thoughts to a beach, forest or any one of a series of places which have been formulated by each of the volunteers to select to suit the individual needs of the client. The volunteer follows a pre-determined number of scripts, aligned to the client and to ensure a consistent approach. The client is left to relax with the music for 5–10 min as appropriate and the volunteer remains in the area. The music is low level near to the client but not in an obtrusive way.
- 5 They are then gently brought back into the environment and moved back to the upright position and offered a drink. When they feel comfortable and aware we ask them to complete the audit form, discuss aftercare, clients are offered a small amount of their chosen aromatherapy blend in a rollette bottle to apply to the inner wrist to aid continuance of their relaxation away

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