



## Review

# Healthcare professionals' perceptions of the value and impact of the arts in healthcare settings: A critical review of the literature

Ceri Wilson<sup>a,\*</sup>, Hilary Bungay<sup>b</sup>, Carol Munn-Giddings<sup>a</sup>, Melanie Boyce<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SQ, United Kingdom<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Medical Science, Anglia Ruskin University, Young Street, Cambridge CB1 2LZ, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Internationally there is growing interest in the use of the arts in the healthcare context evidenced by the number of research studies reported in the nursing and medical literature. Establishing successful projects in healthcare environments will to some extent be reliant on the cooperation of staff working in these settings: healthcare professionals and their cultural values will be the lynchpin in the relationship between the artists organising the activities and the patients. This review appraises healthcare professionals' perceptions of the value of the arts in healthcare settings, and the impact of the arts on healthcare professionals.

**Methods:** A critical review of the literature between 2004 and 2014 was undertaken. The following databases were searched: MedLine, CINAHL, AMED, Web of Science and ASSIA. Searches included words from three categories: arts activities; healthcare settings, and healthcare providers. Studies were included if they were written in English, explored the attitudes of healthcare professionals on the use of the arts in healthcare settings or the impact of arts activities on healthcare staff. Studies conducted in community venues and/or reporting on arts therapies (art, drama or music) were excluded. An initial 52 studies were identified and following screening for relevance and quality 27 articles were reviewed. Arts interventions were diverse and included music listening, visual arts, reading and creative writing, and dance.

**Results:** Despite some methodological limitations of the reviewed studies it was found that the majority of staff believed that engaging in arts interventions has a positive impact on patients' health and well-being. The findings suggest that arts interventions are perceived to have an impact on patients' stress, mood, pain levels, and sleep. Furthermore, staff believed that the arts can enhance communication between staff and patients, helping to build rapport and strengthen interactions. The majority of reported staff outcomes were positive, with arts activities in healthcare settings found to: decrease stress, improve mood, improve job performance, reduce burnout, improve patient/staff relationships, improve the working environment and improve well-being.

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Adult and Mental Health Nursing, Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SQ, United Kingdom. Tel.: +44 0845 196 4189.

E-mail addresses: [ceri.wilson@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:ceri.wilson@anglia.ac.uk) (C. Wilson), [hilary.bungay@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:hilary.bungay@anglia.ac.uk) (H. Bungay), [carol.munn-giddings@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:carol.munn-giddings@anglia.ac.uk) (C. Munn-Giddings), [melanie.boyce@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:melanie.boyce@anglia.ac.uk) (M. Boyce).

**Conclusions:** This review fills a gap in the literature, providing the first review of healthcare professional's views of the arts in healthcare settings and the impact of arts activities on healthcare staff. The largely positive perceptions of staff will aid in the implementation of arts activities in healthcare settings, which will enhance care and benefit both patients and healthcare staff.

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## What is already known about the topic?

- Participating in arts activities can enhance mental health, social cohesion, happiness and well-being.
- Internationally arts interventions are being used in healthcare settings as an adjunct to conventional medical treatments.
- There is evidence of the positive effects of arts interventions on the physiological and psychological outcomes of patients in hospital environments.

## What this paper adds

- Across the globe healthcare professionals' perceive that the use of arts interventions within healthcare settings can have a positive impact upon patients' health and well-being.
- Different arts activities are utilised across different healthcare settings and are found to have numerous physical and psychological benefits not only to patients but also to healthcare staff.
- Taking part in activities that require collaboration improves staff/patient relationships and enhances communication.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years there has been growing concern internationally about poor recruitment and retention of nursing staff in healthcare settings, as healthcare industries experience high rates of staff turnover with significant implications for quality of care (e.g. [Park et al., 2014](#); [Tilden et al., 2012](#)). The [World Health Organisation \(2014\)](#) reported that in 2013 there was a shortfall of 7.2 million healthcare workers worldwide, and this is expected to rise to 12.9 million by 2035. The global nursing shortage has put pressure on governments and healthcare providers to identify and implement staff retention strategies. The following factors have been found to increase retention of nurses and quality of patient care: improved working environments (e.g. [Baernholdt, 2009](#); [Cohen et al., 2009](#); [Gardner et al., 2007](#); [Hayes et al., 2006](#); [Twigg and McCullough, 2014](#)), increased work-related social support (e.g. [Choi et al., 2011](#); [Naude and McCabe, 2005](#)), reducing stress and burnout ([Applebaum et al., 2010](#); [Leiter and Maslach, 2009](#); [Mosadeghrad, 2013](#); [Oyeleye et al., 2013](#)), and job satisfaction and enjoyment ([Anderson, 2008](#); [Erenstein and McCaffrey, 2007](#); [Johnstone, 2003](#); [Mrayyan, 2005](#); [Naude and McCabe, 2005](#)).

Across the globe for the past 20 years there has also been an increasing interest in the use of the arts in the healthcare context. The growing body of international literature within the nursing and medical journals is a testament to the potential value of incorporating arts activities into clinical settings as adjuncts to conventional medical treatments. In 2004 a seminal review was published, which examined and identified a number of benefits to using arts in healthcare settings ([Staricoff, 2004](#)). An updated review ([Staricoff and Clift, 2011](#)) provided further evidence of the positive effects of music interventions on psychological and physiological outcomes of hospital patients. [Staricoff's \(2004\)](#) review briefly considered the outcomes of arts interventions on healthcare professionals. The review reported on studies concerning job satisfaction, and the use of the arts in medical and nursing training to improve communication, empathy and understanding of patients' needs. A number of studies in a range of healthcare settings (spanning both physical and mental health) have since been conducted and discrete reviews of the literature, e.g. [Clift et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Daykin et al. \(2008\)](#), have consistently indicated the benefits to the 'end user' of participatory arts interventions. However, there appears to be no review around the impact of these activities on healthcare professionals. If the existing literature identifies staff outcomes resulting from arts activities which are associated with nurse retention, arts activities may serve as an additional tool for healthcare providers attempting to increase nursing staff retention.

There is also to date no review of the attitudes of healthcare professionals regarding the use of arts activities in healthcare settings. This represents a concerning knowledge gap in light of the previously identified central role of healthcare practitioners' knowledge, attitudes and skills in the adoption of practices in healthcare ([Kontos and Poland, 2009](#)). [Kontos and Poland's \(2009\)](#) Critical Realism and the Arts Research Utilisation Model (CRARUM) incorporates critical realism to acknowledge the central role of healthcare practitioners in the adoption of new practices in healthcare. Therefore, the attitudes of healthcare professionals towards arts activities in healthcare settings is an important area to investigate because establishing successful projects in healthcare environments will be reliant on the cooperation of the staff working in these settings. Healthcare professionals and their cultural values will be the lynchpin in the relationship between the artists organising the activities and the 'patients' or 'service users'. The present review examines both the perceptions of healthcare professionals on the use

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