



The Efficacy of Art Therapy in Pediatric Oncology Patients: An Integrative Literature Review



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ABSTRACT

Problem: Children undergoing cancer treatment experience detrimental adverse side effects that may be addressed with complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) such as art therapy. The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of art therapy in pediatric patients living with cancer.

Eligibility criteria: An integrative literature review was conducted using the CINAHL, OVID Medline, and PsycINFO databases. Studies were included if they were a primary source utilizing an art therapy intervention in children with cancer age birth to 18 years old, was published between the year 2000 and 2016, and written in the English language.

Sample: Seven primary sources met inclusion criteria.

Results: Few studies were reported in this review. Findings of this review suggest that children who participated in various forms of drawing interventions exhibited enhanced communication with family members and healthcare providers. Additionally, children were able to better express underlying emotions, developed more effective coping skills, and experienced a reduction in adverse side effects.

Conclusions: Implementing a drawing intervention or other forms of art into the holistic care of a pediatric oncology patient may assist in maximizing quality of life and allow for a more tolerable lifestyle.

Implications: Acquiring a means of proper communication with children through art allows nurses to gain insight on the needs of this special patient population, resulting in a higher quality plan of care.

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Contents

Background and Significance	174
Purpose.	174
Research Question	174
Methods	174
Design.	174
Literature Search Strategy	174
Data Evaluation and Analysis	174
Results	175
Study Characteristics and Quality.	175
Emotional Expression/Communication	176
Coping Skills/Distracton.	176
Reduced Symptoms and Improved Well-Being.	176
Discussion	177
Limitations	178
Conclusion	178
Acknowledgments	178
References	178

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Childhood cancer affects one in 285 children in the United States each year, equating to an estimated 15,980 children living with cancer each year (American Childhood Cancer Organization [ACCO], 2015). Globally, over 250,000 children from birth to age 20 years old are diagnosed with some form of cancer every year, with a diagnosis being made on an average of every 3 min (ACCO, 2015). The most common types of cancer diagnosed in the pediatric population include leukemia, lymphoma, brain and central nervous system tumors, bone cancer, and neuroblastoma (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2015). Although survival rates have improved, cancer remains to be the leading cause of death by disease in American children. These patients often undergo rigorous treatments that may include chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, and targeted therapy (ACCO, 2015). The aggressive nature of these treatments can result in short and long-term adverse side effects such as pain, fatigue, distress, nausea, and an alteration in sleep and mood (Kanitz, Camus, & Seifert, 2012; Sencer & Kelly, 2007). It is important to remember that although children are smaller in stature, they may experience the same levels of pain or discomfort as adults receiving similar treatment.

A reduction in adverse side effects due to treatment and an improvement of overall health have been reported by 91% of adult oncology patients that have utilized complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) such as art, music, and dance therapy (Somani, Ali, Ali, & Lalani, 2014; Tomlinson, Hesser, Ethier, & Sung, 2011). Additionally, findings of previous research have indicated that the use of CAM and other mind-body therapies has had positive effects on the quality of life in pediatric oncology patients (Ott, 2006). While there is a significant amount of research on the effects of CAM on quality of life, current literature lacks evidence on the specific effects of art therapy in the pediatric oncology patient population. The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) (2013) defines art therapy as improving and enhancing the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals through the creative process of art production. This intervention has been used widely as adjuvant therapy for a variety of conditions including cancer (Hart, 2010).

Background and Significance

The incidence of childhood cancer has been rising over the past few decades; however, advances in cancer treatments have increased the survival rate in more than 80% of children (ACS, 2015). Though majority of childhood cancers respond well to treatment, it unfortunately comes with the cost of detrimental adverse side effects. Due to their resilient nature, a child's body recovers much quicker than adults, leading them to potentially undergo more intensive treatment and higher doses of chemotherapy (Malchiodi, 2013). With the encompassing nature that cancer treatment imposes on a child's everyday life, it is vital for healthcare providers to assess their patient's physical, emotional, psychosocial, and developmental needs. A holistic assessment will allow an appropriate plan of care to be developed to maximize patient quality of life. Unlike adult patients, it is plausible that the assessment of these needs are more likely to be difficult in children and adolescents due to communication barriers such as a limited vocabulary or cognitive capacity to express their thoughts and emotions (Rollins, 2005). Likewise, as a result of normal developmental stages, the cognitive capacity of children is evolving every day with the necessity to change or adapt to their needs more often than that of an adult.

Art therapy has been demonstrated as a helpful tool in coping with stressful and traumatic situations, increasing self-esteem, and reducing stress and anxiety (AATA, 2013; Hart, 2010). The production of art itself has been one of the longest standing forms of communication. Adrian Hill first discovered the therapeutic effects of using art therapy as a form of communication in 1938 during his recovery from tuberculosis. In 1942, he published his findings on the benefits and effectiveness on a wide range of medical conditions and later became the first employed art therapist (Bitonte & De Santo, 2014). Malchiodi (2013) explains that

the goals of art therapy in the health care setting include, but are not limited to, "psychosocial care, rehabilitation, health benefits, and reauthoring the dominant narrative of illness" (p. 5). Regardless of the advancements of art therapy throughout the years, the intervention appears to be an underutilized tool (Bitonte & De Santo, 2014) that may possess the potential in producing significant benefits in the pediatric population.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to conduct an integrative review of the literature that was recently published between 2000 and 2016 to examine the effects of art therapy in children living with cancer. The synthesized findings from the research are intended to provide pediatric oncology nurses with the knowledge to better assess, understand, and care for these young patients. The research methodology, results, discussion, and the implications for future practice and research are discussed in this integrative literature review.

Research Question

An integrative literature review approach was used to answer the following question: What are the effects of art therapy in pediatric oncology patients?

Methods

Design

The integrative literature review was approached using the framework of Whittemore and Knafl (2005) by following the steps of problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation. This design allows the researcher to combine experimental, non-experimental, theoretical, and empirical data to gain insight on a topic of concern (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Data reviewed included both qualitative and quantitative literature making this design the most optimal for the purposes of this research.

Literature Search Strategy

A search of the literature was conducted via the CINAHL, OVID Medline, and PsychINFO databases. Inclusion criteria for this study consisted of: (a) primary sources that discussed an art therapy intervention; and (b) art therapy interventions that were applied to pediatric oncology patients age birth to 18 years old. Key terms entered into each database were MH Exact Subject Heading "art therapy" AND "oncology", explode *Art Therapy*/AND explode *Neoplasms*/, and MJ Word in Major Subject Heading "art therapy" AND "oncology", respectively. The search results were limited to: (a) publication year between 2000 and 2016; (b) English language; and (c) age birth to 18 years old, yielding a total of 48 sources. After reviewing the abstracts of the literature, exclusion criteria were applied as seen in Fig. 1, resulting in seven total primary sources obtained for analysis. The abstracts of the 41 excluded articles were read twice to ensure that they did not meet the inclusion criteria of this study.

Data Evaluation and Analysis

The resulting seven articles from the systematic literature search were separated into subgroups of six qualitative sources and one quantitative source. Sources were read in their entirety twice to determine quality. While reading thorough each source, data were extracted and entered into qualitative and quantitative matrices with guidance from components of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2013) checklist. Each data matrix listed the article source, purpose/problem, sample, framework, method/design, themes/results, instruments, and

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