

How can the creative arts help our NHS?

Creative arts workshops can be a hard sell for NHS trusts and local authorities as the accepted model of care comes in the form of doctors and pills rather than artists and paint brushes. But this is a narrative we would like to see abolished.

Another winter and another NHS winter crisis. This year we have started to see official information from the authorities¹ asking members of the public to refrain from using the service unless they are experiencing an 'emergency'. Appointments have been cancelled, hip replacements indefinitely postponed and little thought given to those who are having a mental health crisis. The lack of funding from the government has had an enormous impact on our proud NHS. But maybe there is a way to dampen the effect; creative arts.

Studies have shown that the creative arts have a measurable impact on decreasing hospital admissions. The health and social work sphere has been greatly enriched by creative arts programmes, which significantly improve mental health, stem depression and reduce anxiety both at home and in the workplace. As a result, those taking part are less likely to require the services of the NHS. By keeping people out of hospital we can start to refocus the hospital setting as a place for intensive and emergency care. According to research carried out last year in areas of deprivation in London 79-82% of people ate more healthily and participated in more physical activity after engaging with the arts². A healthy lifestyle is the miracle cure described by the NHS itself³ and the arts have been shown to lead to it. So why are there not more creative arts programmes throughout the health and social care system?

Delivering creative arts workshops is often a hard sell for NHS trusts and local authorities as the accepted form of medicine comes in the form of doctors and pills and not artists and paint brushes. It is easy to placate critics by announcing extra funding or more doctors without any real thought given to other working options. This is a narrative we must abolish if we are to adapt to a changing world and take advantage of new effective methods of treatment. For now, charities like Create rely on voluntary donations to run projects in hospitals, hospices, schools and community centres, designing and delivering rigorously evaluated programmes often on a shoestring budget.

Reducing agitation experienced by an older person with dementia might not seem like the solution for our healthcare crisis but its effectiveness is becoming increasingly accepted and was even promoted in last year's parliamentary report on arts, health and wellbeing⁴. Charities like ours are paving the way for a future where the creative arts are seen as not just beneficial, but vital to a healthy lifestyle and wellbeing.

Nicky Goulder, Co-founder and Chief Executive of Create, the UK's leading charity empowering lives through the creative arts; and Vice-Chair of The Queen's Nursing Institute, the charity dedicated to improving the nursing care of people in their own homes and communities.

¹ <https://twitter.com/NHSWSCCG/status/948506735068745728>

² http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_The_Short_Report.pdf

³ <https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/whybeactive.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>



Notes to editors

Create

Create is the UK's leading charity empowering lives through the creative arts. Our focus is on engaging the most marginalised participants in inspiring, sustainable arts programmes in areas where provision is poor and engagement in the arts is therefore low. We prioritise our work with seven participant groups: young patients; disabled children and adults; young and adult carers; schoolchildren in areas of deprivation; vulnerable older people; young and adult offenders; and marginalised children and adults.

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