Effect of Art Making on Cancer-Related Symptoms of Blood and Marrow Transplantation Recipients

Lisa Mische Lawson, PhD, CTRS, Phoebe Williams, PhD, RN, FAAN, Cathy Glennon, RN, MHS, OCN®, BC-NE, Kendall Carithers, Erin Schnabel, Amy Andrejack, and Nicole Wright

High levels of pain, fatigue, and many other symptoms are reported by individuals receiving treatment for cancer (Anderson et al., 2007). To cope with and relieve the side effects of cancer treatment, many individuals turn to complementary and alternative therapies in addition to standard medical treatment (Williams et al., 2006). This article describes the effects of a specific complementary approach, art making, for individuals receiving blood or marrow transplantation (BMT) treatment.

Art Therapy and Art Making

Art therapy is a mental health intervention based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression improves and enhances individuals’ physical, mental, and emotional well-being (American Art Therapy Association, 2010). Art therapists are master’s level professionals who hold a degree in art therapy or a related field (Art Therapy Alliance, 2011). Art therapy is well established for individuals with mental health concerns and is a growing trend in health care for patients with cancer. Evidence suggests that art therapy reduces levels of anxiety and other therapy-related symptoms in patients with cancer and caregivers (Bar-Sela, Atid, Danos, Gabay, & Epelbaum, 2007; Nainis et al., 2006; Thyme et al., 2009; Walsh, Radcliffe, Castillo, Kumar, & Broschard, 2007). Although art therapy may be beneficial for patients with cancer, it can be costly and time consuming. Art therapy must be administered by an art therapist and requires time to verbally process the feelings associated with the art experience. Therefore, art making is a practical alternative to art therapy, as it does not require an art therapeutist.