

# Preferences for Photographic Art Among Hospitalized Patients With Cancer

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**A**lternative and complementary therapies may increase patient satisfaction, well-being, and outcomes and may be beneficial during extended stays. Music therapy, art therapy, massage therapy, meditation, and relaxation have helped many people with cancer (American Cancer Society, 2012). Complementary therapies have been evaluated with the cancer population, but little is known about the specific impact of photography (Geue et al., 2010; Oncology Nursing Society, 2009).

Many hospitals now provide patients with meditation rooms and healing gardens. Thoughtfully selected artwork, including photographs, paintings, prints, and sculptures, also are found on display throughout hospitals. Although many patients and visitors can take advantage of walking outside, patients with cancer, by virtue of their decreased white blood cell counts, often are prohibited the benefits of communing with nature.

Photography, however, may be one way for patients to experience the benefits of nature. In addition, although fewer patients with cancer require hospitalization at the current study facility, those that do typically are hospitalized for extended stays. The researchers of the current study have noted that, during those stays, the patient's quality of life (QOL) and experience of the hospital environment become vitally important. Nightingale (1860) wrote about the significance of the environment for its impact on physical health, mental health, and recovery. She recognized that to regain health, people need adequate ventilation, odor reduction, and windows for natural light and outdoor views. Nightingale (1860) believed that integrating the natural environment with views of the outdoors was a strategy to improve human comfort.

More than 150 years later, the impact of the aesthetics of the hospital environment on patients and healing is still being explored. Photographic art is a form of aesthetics that may positively impact a patient's hospital experience. The primary purpose of this descriptive

**Purpose/Objectives:** To determine the preferences of patients with cancer for viewing photographic art in an inpatient hospital setting and to evaluate the impact of viewing photographic art.

**Design:** Quantitative, exploratory, single-group, post-test descriptive design incorporating qualitative survey questions.

**Setting:** An academic medical center in the midwestern United States.

**Sample:** 80 men (n = 44) and women (n = 36) aged 19–85 years ( $\bar{X}$  = 49) and hospitalized for cancer treatment.

**Methods:** Participants viewed photographs via computers and then completed a five-instrument electronic survey.

**Main Research Variables:** Fatigue, quality of life, performance status, perceptions of distraction and restoration, and content categories of photographs.

**Findings:** Ninety-six percent of participants enjoyed looking at the study photographs. The photographs they preferred most often were lake sunset (76%), rocky river (66%), and autumn waterfall (66%). The most rejected photographs were amusement park (54%), farmer's market vegetable table (51%), and kayakers (49%). The qualitative categories selected were landscape (28%), animals (15%), people (14%), entertainment (10%), imagery (10%), water (7%), spiritual (7%), flowers (6%), and landmark (3%). Some discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative sections may be related to participants considering water to be a landscape.

**Conclusions:** The hypothesis that patients' preferences for a category of photographic art are affected by the psychophysical and psychological qualities of the photographs, as well as the patients' moods and characteristics, was supported.

**Implications for Nursing:** Nurses can play an active role in helping patients deal with the challenges of long hospital stays and life-threatening diagnoses through distraction and restoration interventions such as viewing photographic images of nature.

**Knowledge Translation:** Nurses can use photographic imagery to provide a restorative intervention during the hospital experience. Photographic art can be used as a distraction from the hospital stay and the uncertainty of a cancer diagnosis. Having patients view photographs of nature is congruent with the core nursing values of promoting health, healing, and hope.