



Advice For Artists Working With Patients

Working with patients is a rewarding activity and an excellent way of using your expertise to help people. The evidence is strong that patients who engage with an artist improve their self confidence, self esteem and depression ratings as well as relieving anxiety.

Starting

- The most difficult people to persuade are often the staff and doctors, so start with them. Ask the manager to invite the staff for a 'session' with you. It's a good way to get to know everyone and often the medical staff will begin to see the benefits of coming to you. They can come in groups or on their own.

- Taster sessions for both staff and patients is good way to start.

- Book a room and make sure it's big enough for what you are planning. In addition make sure there are things like tables and chairs, adequate heating and the materials you need.

- It's often better to start patients as a one to one. This is less alarming for them. In this way you also become their mentor, or protector who can lead them into group settings. Engagement with a group has huge health and social benefits.

Important Issues

- You are an artist and not a health worker. Patients will quite often trust you and form a strong bond with you. They may tell you distressing things. It is not your role to offer advice or to solve their problems. Listening is often the best medicine anyway. If you are alarmed by what someone is saying, then you should inform their doctor, by leaving a note or talking to him/her. You will need to have a clear idea about your roles and responsibilities and duty of care before you start.
- It is useful and positive to feed back to doctors or other referrers about patients they have sent you. This reinforces behaviour (i.e. referring to you) and also is of interest to the doctor. Remember that you are now part of a team, who are all trying to help patients.
- Be flexible and let the patients lead you to where they want to go. If they are keen on one particular medium or subject, try and meet their demands.
- It is important to be clear with patients that by seeing you they are not necessarily ill. If stigma becomes attached to seeing the artist, then numbers will reduce. You are not delivering art therapy. However engagement with an artist has been proven to increase self confidence etc.
- Start a patient with a simple exercise. It is usually better to start with a specific skill based project and be willing to go at the patients pace. Many patients who are referred are used to failing so that even something simple that is achieved is a major step.

- Employment. Remember that if you are working with under sixteen year olds you may need to have a police check carried out on you. All therapist and workers at the surgery have to do this.
- Pay. The arts council recommends £175 for a full day of work.
- Other issues surrounding being self employed and insurance etc can be found at: www.thetoolkit.net/factsheets. This site has some useful resources.
- Another excellent site for art teachers is: <http://www.creativelearningagency.org.uk/adviceandsupport/default.aspx> This gives information and support about many different aspects of your work.

At The End

- One of your roles is to signpost patients who may wish to continue developing their creative skills to further courses. Make sure you have details about this.
- Evaluation is essential in this field. Please make sure that all questionnaires are completed. This is a bore and can affect the experience for patients but without it, it will be difficult to secure more funding for yourself.
- A final exhibition with the local press invited, taking place in the surgery, is usually very successful and increases the effect of your work. Patients have repeatedly reported that some end product from art sessions give them a lasting reminder of what it was that made them feel better.