



## COMMENTARY

# Art as a Hope of Life: Role of Art Therapy in Cancer Management

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## ABSTRACT

Arts and designs are imprinted impressions creating happiness and charm in personality and are required to create social harmony for a better and developed society. Designs are artistic expressions explaining hundreds of hidden or untold stories creating several questions and quests for their answers leading to solutions of significant humanity issues. Health issues are among the major challenges faced by humanity and cancer accounts among top cause of human mortality of about 10 million deaths per year. Several therapeutic including pharmaceutical and radiological approaches are being implemented but cancer mortality is on rise asking for another view on this issue. Considering the rise of death, the invasion of cost-effective interdisciplinary approaches has been proposed and there are very few evidence of involvement of arts and designs in cancer management which is most cost-effective strategy to stimulate the immunity system leading towards the inner-treatment of cancer patients. Last decade has witnessed the hundreds of psychological approaches applied and emergence of psycho-oncology as most effective therapeutic approach. Integration of arts designs with psychological approaches may help the patients to create the hope for life and call for treatment stimulating the inner-immunity system to fight against cancer cells in body. Challenges to convince the health professionals and authorities to adopt the arts based therapeutic discipline may prolong the positive conclusion but going smooth will all of it may put a full stop on the rising mortality of human beings.

**Keywords:** Arts and Designs, Medical anthropology, Psycho-oncology, Cancer control, Cancer management

**A**nthropological studies help us to understand why some people are categorised as stronger than others when it comes to face a disease because a patient is always fighting an internal war so that an external therapy can be effective (Mukhopadhyay and Henze, 2003; Stefansson, 2020). This situation is much worse when it comes to an uncured disease such as Cancer. Cancer, for majority of the patients means a horrible death because it brings a lot of challenges in patient's life ranging from economic, social to family-related issues (Page and Adler,

2008). Although it is the absolute end of life race for almost all cancer victims but very few of them fight back and try harder to live more and steal more time whereas very rare have been succeeded to win their internal war and so external therapies worked well and they survived longer (Puetz, Morley and Herring, 2013).

In this commentary, an entirely different and novel approach is being presented to discuss the necessity of applying pre-therapeutic techniques before regular treatment for cancer is going to be started.

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I did a critical literature review analysis to explore and understand why some people are stronger than others, especially when it comes to face a sickness. Although it is a general fact that every disease is a scary one and the people are afraid of being sick because it is universal truth that 'health is wealth' but when it comes to the Cancer, it becomes scariest one (Penson *et al.*, 2004; Ropeik, 2023). Although Cancer is the second-leading cause of the death that makes it more scarier because it brings lots of socioeconomical damage (Siegel, Giaquinto and Jemal, 2024), but there are many who fought back, overcame the fear and recovered completely.

Few years ago while doing the literature review analysis, I found a wonderful writer, *Ervin D. Yalom* who had published several novels about patients and interestingly, one of his patients-in-novel was a cancer patients who for sure survived and lived a healthy life after the winning (Yalom, 2020). His book described that how the patients were able to fight to their disease and to win. All of them (patients-in-novel) had a common point i.e. hope. Their hope to have a good life again and to have hope that they could be alive was all they fought for. It was obvious that everybody had the hope and not the time of illness as also well discussed by Groopman (Groopman, 2005). It is a fact that naturally, we desire to survive and live longer as the natural law and we know that finally we have to die but as we don't know when we have to do, so we fight for the survival and try to live longer every day. But what happen when a person get sick of a disease, especially Cancer, they lose the hope and will to survive as they realize that death is almost near. So, without hope life might be impossible or too hard resulting the increased chances of death. Whereas the patients-in-novel of Ervin were different and they faced cancer and other diseases differently. It is difficult, almost impossible to survive an illness like cancer (Scheier and Carver, 2001), but Ervin's patients-in-novel when found symptoms of cancer they

were referred to the psychologists to find out ways of their wellbeing, that was what made them different.

Paola was one of the patients-in-novel who tried to give her life spiritual meaning and was inspired by one artwork, a painting by her daughter which shows suffering of life in representation of body of a saint (Paola, 2002). Paola started to communicate with this painting and to create a meaning for her life (Drury, 2002). According to Yalom, the meaning of life is to create an essence of creation or self-actualization as he said that "I believe that art is a tool and that, like all tools, it has functions" (Yalom, 2020). Alain de Botton also described the art as a tool and focused that it is important to know what the tool is for so that we can better know how and when to use it to reach the meaning of life (De Botton, 2013). Mackowiak correlated the meaning of life with the history of the art and called the art as a reason to keeping ourselves alive. The author described numerous artists who faced their diseases just by applying art in their daily lives (Mackowiak, 2019). Frida kahlo, was one of the patients who used art to enhance her hope for life because. She was a medical student but after her accident she was forced to stay on bed for several months (Nixon, 1996). She described it as a bad crash as she was unable to walk or stand for a very long time, so she decided to paint during this crucial time. Her words were 'why I need my feet when I will have wings for flying'. Painting gave her hope and even she tried to be pregnant as she was waiting to have normal life again very soon. Frida had a bad suffering and she was one evidence for Nietzsche's expression as she said 'if it was not the art, the reality of sickness would perish her' (Dosamantes-Beaudry, 2001).

Another artist, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was born with congenital problem (de Toulouse-Lautrec and Cooper, 1952; Markatos *et al.*, 2018). His father refused him, and he decided to earn money and live independent by art. After he was left alone by his family, he developed different perspective about the world, and this is well reflected in his all art work. He

started to show colours in his paintings, and they showed people who had low level in the society because he was also at this level, so he started showing the world the colours of the life. He believed that a disease should not let us to wait for our death, but we should create a hope to develop the skills and live longer. His work was mostly lines and colours only as he did not know how to paint and he believed that it is enough as we have started to draw whatever we do know, lines and colours. As he had hope to live, he believed that his hands and his muscle will enjoy the work and will develop the necessary skills. He believed that 'art can change everything especially our view to life as we can freeze our time in painting and it is a kind of immortality' (Peters, 1961).

Art is above the imagination as art is the essence to win over every hard time or suffering we have, that has been applied by several patients-turned-artists and as a transdisciplinary approach, we can apply this to create hope in cancer patients, to give them a purpose of life and a way so they can fight their sickness internally to make the external therapy more effective.

### Conflict of Interest:

No conflict of interest is declared.

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