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The arts have always been known to lift spirits or provide comfort throughout a person's life...



Pianist Horace Clarence Boyer performs for patients and staff at Franklin Medical Center as part of the Community Arts, Health and Healing Project.



Music is part of the healing process and a source of comfort at Franklin Medical Center.

ART OF HEALING

By **GEORGE LENKER**

Staff writer

When playwright William Congreve wrote "Music has charms to soothe a savage breast ... To soften rocks or bend a knotted oak," little did he know how much soothing music - and the arts in general - can provide.

The arts have always been known to lift spirits or provide comfort throughout a person's life, and these nurturing aspects of the humanities are now being used to aid the ill and their loved ones at Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield. Through a University of Massachusetts program called the Community Arts, Health and Healing Project, the hospital hopes to enrich and nurture patients, visitors and staff.

Although hospitals are venues of caring and healing, they are often seen as cold and clinical environments. The very antiseptic nature that is necessary for providing safe, modern health care can also lead to an emotionally sterile setting.

"Some people will do anything they can to avoid going to a hospital,

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Gretchen Stone, left, Phyllis Roy, center, and Trudi Stone perform in the lobby of Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield as part of the Community Arts, Health and Healing Project.

Healing: Arts lift spirits, provide comfort

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even for a visit. That should concern us," said Karen Moore, vice president of hospital operations at Franklin Medical Center.

It is with that concept in mind that Moore and UMass nursing professor Jeanine Young-Mason set out to make hospitals more user-friendly by way of the arts. The pair also wanted to use arts, crafts and humanities to aid patients' recovery. Mason-Young is co-director of both the UMass project and the program at Franklin Medical Center, where she works closely with Moore.

Young-Mason, who has published several articles on the subject of art in healing, said that the concept is not new, but is not widely utilized. The idea is that emotions affect the body and that creating a beautiful, nurturing atmosphere can only aid those recovering from an illness.

Young-Mason said that by providing patients with such things as paintings, concerts and more attractive settings, it can lower their stress levels and decrease anxiety.

Even simple touches like landscaping or adding plants to a room can make a big difference, Young-Mason said. Along with beautifying a room, plants also provide direct health benefits. The onset of more tightly sealed, energy efficient buildings coupled with the use of formaldehyde-laden particle board has made indoor air pollution a growing concern. Plants can lessen the effect of this problem.

Combining concerts, art exhibits and a redesign of various spaces in the center, the hospital has undergone a massive change.

"NASA did a study in the 1980s that showed that certain houseplants pull toxic chemicals out of the air," Young-Mason said.

But plants are just one component of what Franklin Medical Center has done over the past year. Combining concerts, art exhibits and a redesign of various spaces in the center, the hospital has undergone a massive change.

"It really is like nothing else I have seen in my 25 years in the business," Moore said. "Wherever I go, people who have seen it say it now looks more like an art gallery than a hospital."

The pieces of art, Moore noted, are not just typical mass-produced, commercial prints seen in many public spaces, but rather real paintings and photographs by local artists. Along with attracting more attention than cookie-cutter prints, their uniqueness also communicates a message of caring, Moore said.

"People react to real art rather than industrial prints," Moore said. "People can see that their vis-

it to the hospital has been thought about. It makes them feel noticed, and that someone is paying attention to them."

The music program is also a key component to the project. Once a month, the center hosts a concert for patients, usually using local musicians who volunteer their time. One performer was Frederick C. Tillis, former director of the UMass Fine Arts Center.

Tillis - who also serves as co-director of the UMass healing and arts program - first performed for the project at the Northampton Nursing home. The general idea behind the concerts is to bring music to those who are otherwise unable to attend events, he said.

"Arts are usually presented in formal settings," he said. "This brings it to the people who can't access as sort of an outreach program."

Young-Mason noted that music therapy has been used for such treatments as stress relief, pain management and boosting the immune system.

"And, of course, music also just lifts the human spirit," she said.

A third aspect of the project involves improving the physical settings of hospitals - beyond just hanging pieces of art everywhere. This can be accomplished, Young-Mason said, by the aforementioned use of plants, by replacing the drone of television in waiting rooms with healing music, and providing toys and games for children in appropriate spaces.

One place the Franklin Medical

Center has used plants strategically is at the emergency department entrance. Previously, patients and their families could see the ambulances pull up from the lobby - not the most soothing of sights for someone who is awaiting treatment or word on a loved one's condition.

"Now they've created a screen using plants so you no longer have to look out on the parking lot," Young-Mason said. "It's all part of trying to 'green' the hospital."

While anecdotal evidence - such as patients' and visitors' positive comments - indicate that these changes help, Young-Mason and Moore plan on backing up their ideas about art and healing with empirical studies. The hospital will launch evidence-based studies over the next few months, hoping to compile hard data on the effect of art on health and healing.

In the meantime, the hospital keeps expanding ways that the physical environment can positively affect a patient's recovery. This now includes a "comfort food" cart in the lobby that features homemade soup, hot chocolate and buttered rolls. A full cafe along the same lines is already in the planning stage.

"Usually there's just bad vending machine food, but with the cafe, we will have comfort food, reading materials and music tapes all designed to promote healing," Young-Mason said. "Our goal is to have you see and feel beauty and life and color and light no matter where you are."