Arts in Health at FMC: towards a model of practice

2009 Program Evaluation

To capture the impact of this diverse program and to understand how the arts can contribute to health and wellbeing within an acute care hospital, an evaluation was conducted focusing on the main initiatives in the program. The evaluation highlighted the impressive level of activity in the form of:

- 48 (weekly) musical performances in the courtyard and indoor spaces
- Promenade Gallery exhibitions open 365 days throughout the year
- 10 separate exhibitions across Promenade Gallery A and B
- 6 separate exhibitions in Community Gallery
- 6 separate opportunities for hospital users to participate in creative workshops
- A total of 150 South Australian visual artists involved
- Total sale of art works $67,892

Category 1 – Special Projects, each separately developed and funded

> Medico Manoeuvres – Leigh Warren & Danseur residency in wards, outpatient and public areas
> Leigh Warren & Danseur public performance for Adelaide Fringe Festival
> My Favourite things – a music, movement and film project in paediatric ward
> Heartsong – a multi-dimensional and multi-media collaboration with RAUs

Category 2 – Ongoing creative program

a. Exhibitions in Promenade Galleries A and B with continuous, changing exhibitions. Public performances weekly by professional musicians in wards and public spaces
b. Patients’ ‘bedside’ programs including The Art Trolley, Sound for Relaxation, Music Therapy

Category 3 – Environmental Art Consultancy projects – initiatives focusing on sites of hospital redevelopment

> Floating Vessels – cross-cultural weaving in courtyard with Neporendi Southern Indigenous Weavers Group
> Theatre Works – visual artist-in-residence based in the Operating theatres
> Musical Instruments – mixed media creation and permanent installation.
> Re-develop – photography profiling building works and redevelopment

2009 Program Evaluation

Feedback

Feedback from patients and visitors indicated the ways in which their various experiences of the program helped to reduce stress and anxiety, create a relaxed atmosphere and provide a distraction from illness and pain, for example:

Patients’ comments:

...it is very soothing and relaxing....
I was here when the symphony orchestra came and enjoyed that too, thank you. You wouldn’t think you would see that in the hospital?
...it was good to hear some of those old songs again.

Feedback from staff reinforced the positive responses from patients and showed the high regard in which the program is held.

Visitors’ comments:

Such a creative way to acknowledge people’s experience and to educate and inform in a beautiful, artistic way.
Since art has been introduced here it’s become a much different atmosphere...comforting, cheerful, a less frightening place; it’s de-institutionalised the space.
Fascinating glimpse of an otherwise inaccessible world. Illuminating and personal.

Since its earliest beginnings in 1996 Arts in Health at FMC has enriched the life of the hospital by:

- creating a warm and welcoming physical and cultural environment
- supporting staff in their provision of high quality care
- contributing to a positive, nurturing experience for patients and carers
- providing opportunities for the public to engage positively with health services.

Encompassing many different art forms and experiences for patients, staff and visitors, Arts in Health at FMC has moved through many phases during its lifetime, assisted by funding from the FMC Foundation, Arts SA, and additional support from fundraising, sponsorship and donations.

By 2009 Arts in Health at FMC had grown into an unusually broad and varied program comprising:

- multiple art form projects and collaborations
- artists working intensively with identified groups of patients and/or staff
- longer term residencies in visual arts and dance
- weekly musical performances open to all hospital users and the public
- a continuous and regularly changing exhibition program in the public galleries
- ‘roving’ visual artists and musicians working with patients at their bedside
- public and environmental art initiatives integrated in facilities re-development
- music therapy embedded in allied health services
- international speakers, seminars and forums open to practitioners.

Feedback

As well as feedback from patients, staff and visitors about the impact of Arts in Health at FMC, the evaluation generated a good deal of information about how the different elements of the program contributed in different ways.

Reflections by the artists fuelled a more detailed analysis of the particular ways in which varied art forms and practices enabled them to interact creatively with both people and the hospital environment.

Category 3 – Environmental Art Consultancy projects – initiatives focusing on sites of hospital redevelopment

Art may occupy a space of its own or be – either way it is not a neutral intersection but affects the meaning of the art just as it shapes the quality of the space.
Art influences the sense of place through the culture and tone of spaces as well as the look and sound.
The introduction of art and artists changes the interpersonal dynamics; it may shift the focus and locus of control.

Mapping the ‘model of practice’

Insights about how the presence of art and artists affects the environment and the people in the hospital led to thinking in terms of the ‘model of practice’ that was evolving in FMC. This was not an attempt to define or prescribe, but as an aid to decision making about future directions.

It provided a means of lifting attention above the level of day-to-day practical concerns to consideration of the overall program rationale. A range of analytical tools were developed to assist in this process and in subsequent decision-making.

The story continues...

Analysis of the evolving model of practice supported the decision to shift emphasis towards investing in the ‘longing’ elements because of the demonstrated benefits for patients and the more sustainable nature of demands on coordination and resources.

In 2011, Arts in Health at FMC became a permanent department of the Division of Allied Health, a mark of its growing recognition as an integral part of the model of care at Flinders Medical Centre. It continues to provide an ongoing program of arts activities, raising performances and mobile workshops, with special projects and events funded annually through government grants, trusts and foundations, community organisations and individual donations.

A notable trend is the increasing number of specific requests from hospital staff for the involvement of the program in their area, showing how much it is valued. More formalised patient referral systems are being established by some departments to facilitate ease of access to specific activities, while others have taken the initiative to introduce longer term residencies in their areas, in collaboration with Arts in Health at FMC staff.