

# Strength through Creativity: CHRU

## An Evaluation of Arts for Health in Primary Care in Cornwall

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### Introduction

Arts for Health Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (AFHC) promote creative activity to improve health and wellbeing in a variety of settings. Funding was secured from Arts Council England to support a number of artist placements in GP surgeries across Cornwall. All GP surgeries in Cornwall were invited to take part and seven responded. Artists were appointed at six of these and the seventh developed a voucher scheme to encourage patient enrolment with a local Arts Society.

### Objectives

Artists were given free rein to develop their own projects, but typically the activities involved the following:

- Engagement of staff and patients in art-based activity
- Community outreach
- Improvement of GP surgery interior by way of art installations

### Methods

Evaluation data was gathered from:

- Meetings/focus groups with artists, key surgery staff/managers and GPs
- Documentary records including individual project evaluation data, photographs and written feedback from participants

Musician at Falmouth Health Centre Flu Clinic with patient artwork - AFHC

### Results

Despite the fact that all the work revolved around primary care, there was considerable diversity between surgeries in terms of size, working arrangements and environment. However, most surgeries were able to develop a regular creative group for patients from GP and staff referrals. Wider community work was achieved by the engagement of facilities such as Art and History Societies, Archive Trusts, libraries, local care homes and Children's Centres. In every case the surgery GPs and practice managers reported positive outcomes in terms of patient and staff response and an improved environment.

Textile design by Cornwall Care elderly patients linked to Pool Health Centre - Helen Tanner



Although each artist pursued a strategy appropriate to each local situation, a number of shared themes emerged which can be generalised across projects of this type. These were:

**Local flavour** — themes relevant to the locality, e.g. Falmouth (the sea), St Ives (art tradition), Pool (mining history)

**Special events** — e.g. flu jab clinics and health promotion days

**Projects centred on a particular condition** such as with children with asthma and their families

**Waiting Room installations**

**Use of Artist's Resource** — conflict of artistic input with other requirements such as counselling of patients to encourage involvement

**Sustainability** — ideas included funding from Friends groups, PCT commissioning and use of volunteers

*"...it has got me through a very difficult period in my life. I don't think I would have coped at all if I hadn't had the support of this wonderful group"*  
(Participant of creative group)

### Conclusions

The scheme enjoyed a great number of successes in every location, where the imagination and vision of the resident artist blended with the enthusiasm of patients to create an environment for the improvement of wellbeing through creative activity in line with that reported in many research studies. Although work pressures in some cases led to difficulties in referrals for new projects, it was important that there was a key contact in each practice for the artist to use in terms of overcoming barriers. Future models of this kind might incorporate a contract or 'Service Level Agreement' between AFHC and the participating surgeries to clarify protocol such as responsibilities regarding the recruitment and referral of patients. Widening the activities into the local community and improvement of surgery environments brought benefits not only to individuals but also to the surgeries themselves in terms of local reputation and standing in the face of increased competition for health services.

"It's not the tea it's who you drink it with" Still from animation created by patients and artists at Morrab Road Surgery, Penzance, 2008 - Lizzie Black



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