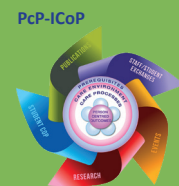


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IDEAS AND INFLUENCES

Creating a symbol of hope for 2021

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Introduction

The idea behind our project was to encourage nursing and midwifery teams to create artistic symbols of hope amid the challenges posed by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Our experiences working with teams using arts-informed approaches have shown us that they offer a space for deeper reflection and a change from more traditional reflection models. The outcome of such projects are unique visual representations of what a subject or event means to the team, and of their emotions and experiences. These are displayed in individual wards and units for all staff, patients, relatives and other visitors to see, often becoming a focal point for conversation.

In November 2020, our practice development unit invited teams from across the local health district to create a symbol of hope for 2021. This was inspired by reading an article in *AI Practitioner*, the international journal of appreciative inquiry, entitled 'Hope and appreciative inquiry during a pandemic' (Houston, 2020). The author describes hope as something that is 'an inescapable part of being a human. Both aspiration, belief in our future and reflection, how we view our past' (p 49). The importance of finding reasons to 'live, share, cry, sing, laugh, love, be fearful' (p 51) is also expressed, with the contention that embracing these as our strengths is where hope lies.

One aspect of the work of the practice development unit is inspiring nurses and midwives to capture the essence of experiences that occur in everyday practice using creative approaches. Arts-informed approaches provide a way for individuals and teams to express their experiences, thoughts and feelings visually and creatively (McCormack and Titchen, 2006; Horsfall and Titchen, 2009).

Creative approaches such as painting, photo elicitation, creative writing, music and dancing can be used to engage our senses, helping us to access, pay attention to and express feelings and experiences, that might initially be difficult to put into words (Horsfall and Titchen, 2009; Sullivan, 2012; Weber, 2012). This is referred to as embodied knowledge, in which the body is the source of knowing rather than the mind (Weber, 2012).

Art in healthcare

In healthcare settings, the use of creative expression in the forms of poetry, photo voice, storytelling and painting have been widely used to explore personal experiences of illness (Frith and Harcourt, 2007; Guillemin and Drew, 2010; Davidson et al., 2012).

As a method of qualitative inquiry, the use of arts adds dimensions that enhance understanding of the phenomena of interest for researchers aiming to elicit meaning around participants' experiences (Morgan et al., 2009; Guillemin and Drew, 2010). Creative expression empowers people to communicate and bring to life their emotions (Stuckey and Tisdell, 2010; Guillemin and Drew, 2010).

Within practice development, McCormack and Titchen (2006) and Horsfall and Titchen (2009) have used creative expression as a vehicle for human flourishing. Opportunities that enable people to reach their potential can be created by encouraging the exploration of experiences in emotional, social, artistic and metaphysical ways (Horsfall and Titchen, 2009). It is the transformation that takes place through reflection that creates a space for meaning to arise.

Facilitating the use of arts-informed approaches

Ten nursing and midwifery teams from across the local health district accepted an invitation to participate in the initiative to create a visual symbol of hope. They were encouraged to reflect on the year of 2020, contemplate their hopes for themselves and their patients in 2021 and design a symbol for display in their ward/unit.

The imagery created by the participants was the source of developing understanding about what hope meant for nurses and midwives. Images evoke both intellectual and emotional responses, inviting researchers and participants collectively or individually to tell their interpreted story, creating new meaning around the topic (Guillemin and Drew, 2010; Weber, 2012).

Covid-19 restrictions on face-to-face working meant the practice development team was unable to conduct an analysis with the creators of the images, so we designed a set of questions to explore and develop our own meaning of what we saw. The questions were developed through methods used in photo elicitation to uncover meaning and emotions relating to the topic being studied (Dewar, 2012). The images were viewed on a few occasions and each time new meaning and insight emerged.

Symbols and interpretations of the practice development team



Many of the teams represented their clinical specialties through their images, such as a heart for cardiology (see Figure 1) and lungs for respiratory (see Figure 2). Words, photos and illustrations were intertwined in their symbols, capturing what enables them to get through dark times, their experiences and hope for the future.

Our interpretations led us to uncover three key areas: a sense of self; the strength that comes through team relationships; and a sense of resilience.

Figure 1: Image created by the cardiology team at Nepean Hospital

Sense of self

Team members contributed individually to the symbols of hope, sharing their reflections, hopes and dreams. A dark cloud emerging into a rainbow, a barren tree blooming into a tree full of blossom symbolised life and hope. A 3D door was created that, when opened, revealed words signifying what hope meant to individuals: engagement, healing, overjoyed, embrace, family, positive, strength, happiness, excellence, wellbeing, care, compassion, time, travel and sharing.



Figure 2: Image created by the respiratory team at Nepean Hospital

Strength through team relationships

Many of the images displayed camaraderie among the teams. Photographs showed team members standing together and, although their mouths were hidden by masks, you could see the smiles in their eyes. One team made people out of pipe cleaners that were all connected by holding hands. They made a circle around the quote below:

'Working hand in hand together grows a strong foundation that flourishes a positive happy team'
(Medical assessment unit team, Nepean Hospital).



Figure 3: Image created by the neurology team at Nepean Hospital

Resilience

Resilience was understood through images that evoked the emotions of individuals and teams building strategies to overcome tough times. There were cutout leaves and plants representing growth, surrounded by words about embracing change, prioritising what is important, togetherness, feeling joy and taking time to heal.

Conclusion

The use of an arts-informed approach in this initiative provided the participants with the freedom to express their emotions and experiences in a creative way. The symbols of hope created by the teams revealed a strong sense that we are all in this together, with an emphasis on care, kindness, looking out for one another and compassion as necessary in keeping hope alive.

The practice development team gained a greater appreciation for the power of arts to offer an alternative way to share stories. We felt privileged to be able to make sense of the images, acknowledging that each time we viewed the images new meaning was created. However, we realised the limitations, such as how our own experiences could impact on our interpretation of the images. For future projects, we aim to foster a greater sense of participation by inviting the teams to share with us through conversations the emotions and experiences shown in the images.

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