



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To investigate the influence of visual art on patient agitation and anxiety levels, while also incorporating nurse feedback.

Effect of visual art on patient anxiety and agitation in a mental health facility and implications for the business case

Nanda, U., Eisen, S., Zadeh, R. S., Owen, D., 2011 | *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing. Volume 18, Issue 5, Pages 386-393*

Key Concepts/Context

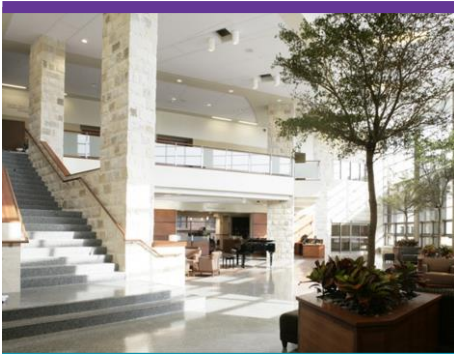
Previous research suggests that even small interior design changes can have positive effects on patients receiving treatment in a variety of healthcare environments. Many of these studies examine patient populations that were moved to completely renovated facilities that featured a multitude of new designs and installations, making it difficult to understand how each individual design change affects the patients. Very little research has explored specifically how the presence of visual art can influence factors such as anxiety and agitation in certain patient populations.

Methods

Three different visual art pieces were mounted to the main wall of a psychiatric patient lounge for 16 to 19 days. The pieces were categorized as abstract (a Jackson Pollack painting), abstract-representational (a Vincent van Gogh painting), and realistic nature (a photograph of the Sahara desert). Patients also were observed for a period of 21 days when no art was present on the wall. Researchers collected data on *pro re nata* (PRN) medication, or medication that was administered to patients experiencing extreme agitation or anxiety. 22 members of the nursing staff were also interviewed about their experiences during the intervention.

Findings

According to interviews with the nursing staff, patients did not find notable differences between the abstract-representational painting and the realistic nature image. The patients would look at the artwork frequently, but would not react physically or verbally. The abstract image, however, did provoke some negative reactions from patients. Regardless, the nurses felt that the presence of the art had an overall positive effect on the patients. The nurses themselves preferred the



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realistic nature image, describing it as “soothing”. PRN incidents were lowest during the presence of the realistic nature image, and were even lower than PRN incidents from the 21-day control period. All three art pieces amounted to an annual savings of \$22,778 per patient and \$4,747 per nurse.

Limitations

This study took place in one psychiatric ward over a relatively short period of time. Patient perspectives are derived from nurse observations, which may be subjective in nature. A relatively limited amount of imagery was used; patients and staff may have different perceptions of different images.

Design Implications

Visual art can be an affordable way to reduce anxiety and agitation in psychiatric patients while also benefitting staff members and overall healthcare costs. Designers might consider testing out a variety of images prior to permanent installation, or choose images featuring natural landscapes, as this study implies that natural imagery may be the most effective.

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