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STUDIE/ARTICLES

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF WELLNESS

KRISTY VAN HOVEN

<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2018-1-2>**ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:**

Museums are community hubs and offer unique opportunities to engage with artifacts on many levels and when museums collaborate with healthcare professionals to create communities of healing and wellness amazing things happen. Through dedicated programs and spaces, museums can foster emotional and physical well-being with the guidance of healthcare professionals. Alternatively, hospitals and care facilities can create unique opportunities for their patients to engage with museum collections to promote healing. It is through these collaborations that patients, caregivers and professionals come together to engage in wellness activities which result in stronger individuals, communities and societies.

Vytváření ozdravných komunit

Muzea jsou společenskými centry, která nabízejí jedinečné příležitosti ke kontaktu s artefakty na mnoha úrovních. A když muzea spolupracují s odborníky na zdravotní péči v zájmu vytváření léčebných a ozdravných komunit, začnou se dít úžasné věci. Muzea mohou prostřednictvím specializovaných programů a prostor podporovat duševní i tělesnou pohodu pod vedením odborných zdravotníků. Nemocnice a pečovatelská zařízení mohou zase vytvářet pro své pacienty jedinečné příležitosti ke kontaktu s muzejními sbírkami v zájmu podpory léčebného procesu. Díky této spolupráci se pacienti, pečovatelé i odborníci zapojují do aktivit na podporu zdraví, jejichž výsledkem jsou zdatnější

jednotlivci, komunity i celá společnost.

KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

museum – well-being – healthcare – visitors
muzeum – duševní a tělesná pohoda – zdravotní péče – návštěvníci

Wellness is usually defined as a state of wellbeing either individually or communally which is self-identified and is associated with varying states of positive physical and mental health.¹ Individuals go through stages of wellness and illness, while communities experiences degrees of growth and regression which lead to a public reflection of a community's well-being in general. Just as doctors work with individuals to create stages of health and wellness, community centers provide spaces and activities that foster community health and wellness through their programs for individuals, families and other community based groups.

Florence Nightingale was one of the first health care professionals to observe that objects, nature, and art can encourage (and in fact speed up) the recovery of patients in a hospital.² In 1927 Dr. Henry Plummer, of the Mayo

Clinic, was charged with the task of designing a clinic building that incorporated art and music to assist patients in their healing.³ By 1936, the Mayo Clinic also integrated a medical museum for the entertainment and education of patients and staff. In the 21st century, art and music programs are commonplace in clinics and hospitals throughout the world. Doctors and nurses understand that a patient's emotional state will contribute to their recovery in the hospital, but what of the patient's well-being beyond the clinical setting? Preliminary observations and studies suggest that museums can, and do, provide the next steps to healing for patients and their caregivers and help maintain overall wellness within their communities.

In the past fifty years museums have evolved from pillars of education to community hubs and cultural centers that create dynamic programs to engage visitors in activities related to the museum's collection and mission. Museums are the heart of communities around the world. Museums foster memories and emotions for every visitor and provide visitors with experiences they can share with others around them. Museums are unique in that they allow each of their visitors to connect with other times and cultures through objects. These objects help visitors learn about others and allow them to connect with their own past. In care facilities, such as hospitals and clinics, these objects can help

¹ Subjective well-being. In DIENER, Ed (ed.). *The Science of Well-being. The collected works of Ed Diener*. S. l.: Springer Netherlands, 2009, pp. 11–58.

² NIGHTINGALE, Florence. Notes on Nursing, What it is and What it is not. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860. In *Project Gutenberg* [online]. [accessed 2018-03-25]. Available from www: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12439>>.

³ CLAPESATTLE, Helen. *The Doctors Mayo*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1940.

bring strangers together to create a community of healing.

To meet the growing demands, these communities of healing and the patients that participate in them; museums, clinics, and hospitals, constantly look for ways to connect their patients and visitors with artifacts, nature and art. While health care facilities strive to eliminate disease and fix broken bodies, many facilities lack a space for patients to heal beyond their physical treatments. In many cases, patients receive treatment and heal wounds in a hospital ward and then return home to be nursed by family and friends. These patients (and those who care for them) often seek an ideal place to process emotions that are evoked during medical treatment and times of grief. They often turn to museums, art galleries and cultural institutions to satisfy their needs⁴ as well as a trusted place to continue their physical healing. According to Lois Silverman, in her book *The Social Work of Museums*, museums can contribute to health in five major ways; 1) promote relaxation, 2) serve as immediate intervention of change in physiology and/or emotions, 3) encourage introspection, 4) foster health education, 5) promote public health and enhance health care environments.⁵ These five roles for museums in healing have sparked an interest in examining how museums can help patients recover through creative programming and experiential museum visits. As museums and galleries start to partner with health care professionals, more

scientific information will come to light about the health benefits of museum visits and cultural participation. Research in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States are independently examining the museum-medical partnerships and their benefits to patient and community healing and wellness.

Example 1: Organized Tours and Experiences in Healthcare Facilities

The author has worked and volunteered with a number of healthcare facilities in North America to create and present collection based programs to patients at the facilities. In one facility, as curator of the historic museum collection, the author created tour based programs for visitors to the museum. Tours of various topics were created to suit the specific needs of the patient-visitor group.

In one case, a hands-on tour through the museum was developed for visually impaired visitors. Most of these visitors had recently had ophthalmologic procedures or were suffering from a side-effect of another procedure which resulted in the temporary or permanent loss of varying degrees of vision. While on tour, the guide would explain objects within the museum collection, explain the historical significance of the object and then pass the object (or an object facsimile) around the group so that visitors could touch the object in an attempt to visualize the story being presented to them. The tour consisted of up to 10 objects relating to the history of the hospital and medicine in general. The goals of this program included allowing the visitors to connect individually with the objects that exemplified the hospital's commitment to health and healing, allowing visitors the opportunity

to connect with the tour guide and fellow visitors through discussions about the object, and learn about the hospital's traditions and contributions to health care. A surprising outcome of these tours were the emotional responses to the space and objects. A subsequent goal of the program was to allow time and space for the visitors to process emotional responses to their visits to the museum and their recent medical procedures. Many times patients would comment that they were familiar with historic staff and were excited to hold and touch an object used by the person. Patients would emerge from the tour not only understanding the history of the hospital but also feeling a sense of relief that they were part of an established community of patients who passed through the hospital and were receiving world recognized care by leaders in the field. It was through the engagement with the objects that patient-visitors were able to process their recent medical experiences and in many cases come to a state of mind where they felt they were able to continue with treatments.

Another tour at the same facility focused on the art around the hospital. The hospital complex consisted of multiple buildings used for patient care, education and research. Each building had public corridors that were decorated with the pieces from the hospital's extensive world renowned collection. There were both daily tours conducted by a volunteer tour guide as well as audio guides and booklets that could be used for self-guided tours. These tours were designed to be a cultural experience that primarily served as a way to pass time for patients between their appointments. Despite the very basic goal of the program, patient-visitors found the tour served many other purposes. The tour, inadvertently, served

4 FEARS, Arthurina. *Museum as a Healing Space: Addressing Museum Visitors' Emotional Responses through Viewing and Creating Artwork* [online]. Boston: Boston University, Department of Art Education, 2011 [accessed 2018-08-25]. Available from www: <https://open.bu.edu/bitstream/handle/2144/2419/The%20Museum%20as%20a%20Healing%20Space_Arthurina%20Fears.pdf?sequence=1>. Master's thesis.

5 SILVERMAN, Lois H. *The Social Work of Museums*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

as a very quick orientation to the complex. Because multiple buildings were on the tour and guides would stop at landmark pieces or art to discuss the pieces, patients found that they could more easily navigate the hospital complex when moving from appointment to appointment. While this alone is an important function, the ability to remove a stressor (such as way-finding during limited time intervals) helped patients be more relaxed during the medical appointments and allow for a more productive conversation between patient and physician.⁶ Eliminating unnecessary stressors is a key objective to modern health care providers and this tour was able to help fulfil that objective without adding pressure to medical and support staff.

The other type of program that is easily created and presented in health care settings are traveling programs, also known as “Museum on Wheels” programs. These programs generally involve a collection of objects that focus on a central topic or theme and are brought to patients⁷, as opposed to patients traveling to the museum or participating in a tour. Once a presenter, or curator, has identified a topic, they gather objects that help illustrate the theme identified or facilitate the telling of the story the curator wishes to share. These objects are generally stable objects that can easily travel between buildings, rooms or facilities; similar in concept to educational

trucks popular in local museums throughout the world.

By making the program portable, the curator and/or volunteer presenters can bring the objects to a patient’s hospital room or recreation area where a group of patients can participate in a program. Presenters then facilitate discussions about objects, narrate stories using objects to illustrate the main themes, and present historical, scientific and cultural facts relating to the objects. The patient-participants can then interact with the objects and the presenters throughout the program. In some cases programs also involve other hands-on activities like creating pieces of artwork or writing stories that reflect the patient’s experience during the program. These programs are ideal for patient-participants that are mobility challenged; those who are in facilities due to mental decay, or are in a rehabilitation program after traumatic injury.

The Museum on Wheels programs can also serve as alternative education for children who live or spend a significant amount of time in a healthcare facility. Many children who are long term patients are unable to attend regular school activities and these programs can supplement private tutoring or paper-based learning activities. By participating in Museum on Wheels programs, student-patients are able to maintain their educational schedules while participating in enrichment activities with their fellow students which fosters a sense of community. Preliminary studies have shown that students who participate in museum based programs during their hospital stay feel less disconnected from their classmates and can more easily integrate back into the classroom, therefore eliminating the feelings

of isolation and being left behind that can easily materialize during a long term hospital stay.⁸

From guided tours of museum exhibitions and artwork displayed throughout the hospital to presenting Museum on Wheels programs to specific patient demographics, health care facilities are starting to utilize their historic, scientific, and art collections to provide experiences for their patients that help them stay integrated and active in their communities.

Example 2: Creating Healing Programs in Galleries and Museum Spaces

Hospitals are not the only institutions that can create patient based programs and support healthcare initiatives. After patients have reached their healing milestones within the care facility they are usually discharged and expected to maintain their health goals at home without the guidance of a physician. The reestablishment of a normal life outside of a care facility can be daunting for any patient, especially those who have faced life altering procedures and diagnoses. Many patients feel a certain apprehension about returning home after a major health event and rely on family and friends to provide additional support during the next phase of their wellness journey. Just as in the care facility, once milestones are reached, family and friends start to return to their normal lives leaving the patient to take on more self-care responsibilities. This is where cultural centers, like

6 Author’s notes associated with tour development at the Mayo Clinic, 2009–2011.

7 CHATTERJEE, Helen, Sonjel VREELAND and Guy NOBLE. *Museopathy: Exploring the Healing Potential of Handling Museum Objects. Museums and Society* [online]. 2009, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 164–177 [accessed 2018-08-25]. Available from www: <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/touchandwellbeing/flash/reading-room/essays-and-articles/chattegee-vreeland-noble.pdf>>.

8 DODD, Jocelyn and Ceri JONES. *Mind, Body, Spirit. How Museums Impact Health and Wellbeing* [online]. Leicester: University of Leicester, Research Center for Museums and Galleries, 2014 [accessed 2018-08-25]. Available from www: <<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/mind-body-spirit-report>>.

museums and galleries, can provide a real service to their community. By welcoming patients into their spaces, museums and galleries can help create a healing community center that can foster continued growth and wellness.

A popular patient group for which museums provide programs are brain health patients. These patients can range from brain trauma and recovery to long-term mental healthcare for diseases such as dementia, Alzheimer's, and post-traumatic stress. These conditions require long term management and can easily lead those living with the conditions to feel isolated from the rest of their community,⁹ which is where a museum based program becomes a lifeline to the patient.

Programs such as Meet Me at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), dementia tours, and military reintegration programs help patients suffering from mental health conditions safely interact with their communities, process emotions associated with their diagnoses, and trigger memories that may foster healing and recovery. By stimulating senses and traveling to museums and galleries, these patients are able to reintegrate into normal life activities, if only temporarily.

Meet Me at MoMA is an initiative of the museum's education department from 2007 to 2014. Over the course of seven years dementia and Alzheimer patients attended programs at the museum that were designed to make the collections and exhibitions accessible to those with memory loss. Through the program visitors would take tours throughout the

9 CORNWELL, Erin Y. and Linda WAITE. Social Disconnectedness, Perceived Isolation, and Health among Older Adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* [online]. 2009, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 31-48 [accessed 2018-08-25]. Available from www: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756979/>>.

galleries and facilitators would encourage discussion about select-ed objects on tour. Visitor-participants were encouraged to make observations about the art; colors, styles, objects within a painting or describe the scenes before them. As visitors became more comfortable with expressing themselves, guides would facilitate conversations about interpreting a piece of art. Questions could facilitate exploration of the historical context of the work or ask participants to imagine they were the artist and describe what choices they might make to create the piece of art on the wall. Like other groups of visitors, these types of questions may lead visitors to share personal experiences about their lives. Once a memory is recovered in a brain health patient, facilitators continued engaging the patient in an effort to encourage more memory recovery during the program.¹⁰

Meet Me at MoMA was a pilot project that has led to other successful programs based in a similar philosophy of encouraging participation and memory stimulation and recovery. Cultural institutions have started to venture into other areas of therapy as well, including physical rehabilitation through tours developed to encourage various types of movement throughout their space and hosting various types of movement classes within their open spaces.

Children's museums are in the best position for these types of programs as their exhibits are designed to be used, touched and explored in many ways. Allowing visitors to move and interact with objects in a variety of ways meets the goals of many physical

10 *Meet Me. The MoMA Alzheimer's Project: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia* [online]. [accessed 2018-03-25]. Available from www: <<https://www.moma.org/meetme/index>>.

rehabilitation programs such as identifying objects and their use, picking up and manipulating an object during use and moving an object through space to another location.¹¹

Physical rehabilitation poses a unique challenge for museums and galleries with permanent collections that may be behind glass or stations. These institutions can still provide programs but may choose to do so via a special program based in the institution's educational collection verses their permanent collection or through festival partnerships with other community organizations with wellness initiatives.

Conclusion

In addition to providing a building, gardens, and physical exhibit space for visitors and patients to gather, cultural institutions provide outlets and social activities for their communities. For patients, these activities can be a physical healing experience (i.e. viewing, speaking, listening, and moving about the space) or it could be emotional, psychological and/or spiritual (i.e. reflection, observation, and meditation).¹² Many museums around the world currently provide these healing opportunities unintentionally through their tours and public programs with great success. More recently, museums, art galleries, nature centers and gardens have made a deliberate effort to address the needs of visitor-patients within their communities by creating specific programs focused on

11 *Enhancing Young Children's Museum Experiences: A Manual for Museum Staff* [online]. 2003 [accessed 2018-03-25]. Available from www: <<http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/~media/Documents/Learning+resources/QMSB/Manuals/enhancing-childrens-museum-experiences.pdf>>.

12 SILVERMAN, Lois H. *The Social Work of Museums*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

health and wellbeing.¹³ At the same time, hospitals and care facilities are starting to recognize the importance of adding more art and culture programs to their care offerings. By creating these wellness programs for patients to use from the start to the end of their medical journeys, museums and cultural centers can be an integral part of the medical care team.

Although these programs are not without physical challenges, like patient-participant accessibility of galleries and artifacts or the ability to stand, sit or actively participate in programs; and emotional-psychological challenges, especially when program participants are experiencing negative or traumatic health episodes during the course of their museum visit; it is through dedicated wellness programs that museums are primed to become a partner in health and wellness which can empower patients to take control of their medical needs and create a sense of belonging within their community. Ultimately, museums and other cultural organizations can create a network of wellbeing to support the needs of their visitors and the communities in which they belong.

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¹³ *Museums in Good Health: An adapted excerpt from Museums On Call: How Museums Are Addressing Health Issues.* Washington: American Alliance of Museums, 2014. For more information see *Museums On Call: How Museums Are Addressing Health Issues* [online]. Washington: American Alliance of Museums [accessed 2018-03-25]. Available from [www: <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/museums-on-call.pdf>](https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/museums-on-call.pdf).

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Kristy Van Hoven is a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester, England and the Director of the National EMS Museum in the United States. She has studied the relationship between museums and health care professionals and the effects of museum visits and cultural program participation on individual and community well-being. She is passionate about finding a way to inspire communities to live healthy and happy lives through museum and cultural based experiences. As the Director of the National EMS Museum, Kristy is developing a program to support emergency responders in their mental health and relationships through specialized wellness initiatives and by engaging her museum's community with mental and physical health activities

through gallery visits, outreach programs, and community based arts presentations. Throughout her career Kristy has been responsible for engaging students, families, volunteers and their communities with a variety of museum collections. She has presented on „e-volunteering“ and digital engagement strategies at museum associations in the United States and co-authored the book *Recruiting and Managing Volunteers in Museums: A Handbook for Volunteer Management* published by Roman & Littlefield in 2016. Kristy looks forward to continuing her collaborative work in building health and wellness programs in her community and in partnership with medical professionals and museums around the world.

Kristy van Hoven je doktorandkou na Univerzitě v Leicesteru v Anglii a ředitelkou Národního muzea zdravotnické záchranné služby v USA. Během svých studií se zabývala problematikou vztahu mezi muzei a odborníky na zdravotní péči a také otázkou, jaký vliv má návštěva muzea a účast na kulturním programu na duševní zdraví jednotlivců i celé komunity. S velkým zanícením se snaží hledat způsoby, jak podnítit veřejnost

k tomu, aby zlepšila kvalitu svého života prostřednictvím muzejních i jiných kulturních zážitků. Jako ředitelka Národního muzea zdravotnické záchranné služby vyvíjí program na podporu duševního zdraví a sociálních vztahů poskytovatelů první pomoci formou specializovaných ozdravných iniciativ a snaží se zapojit veřejnost do aktivit zaměřených na duševní i tělesné zdraví prostřednictvím návštěv galerií, programů aktivní pomoci a uměleckých prezentací v rámci komunity. Už od počátku své profesionální kariéry se snažila vzbudit zájem studentů, rodin, dobrovolníků a jejich komunit o široké spektrum muzejních sbírek. Aktivně se podílela na rozvoji strategie virtuálního dobrovolnictví pod hlavičkou různých muzejních spolků v USA a je spoluautorkou knihy *Nábor a organizování dobrovolníků v muzeích: Příručka pro dobrovolnický management (Recruiting and Managing Volunteers in Museums: A Handbook for Volunteer Management)*, kterou publikovalo vydavatelství Roman & Littlefield v roce 2016. V budoucnu chce pokračovat v spolupráci při vytváření programů zaměřených na zdraví a zdravý životní styl a upevňovat partnerství mezi profesionálními zdravotníky a muzei po celém světě.