

Drama therapy improves mood, reduces pain during hemodialysis

May 15 2013, by Trevor Davis



Jamie Ansley, a spring 2013 master's graduate in theater with a concentration in drama therapy, holds a prompt she used in drama therapy with chronic hemodialysis patients.

For patients with kidney failure, getting creative may provide some relief. Kansas State University researchers are exploring the effects of drama therapy on patients undergoing chronic hemodialysis and are the first in the world to study the topic.

The research is part of a master's thesis by Jamie Ansley, a spring 2013

graduate in theatre with a concentration in drama therapy. Ansley, a former professional hospital clown, has a family member who will soon be receiving [dialysis treatments](#). The treatment for [kidney failure](#) uses a machine that removes wastes and fluid from blood, and then returns clean blood to the body.

Preliminary results of the study show trends in improving mood and reducing pain after using drama therapy, which is the use of drama and theater to achieve healing outcomes. The research, supported by Manhattan-based nonprofit The Drama Therapy Fund, won the poster contest at the 2013 Heartland Kidney Conference in Overland Park.

[Hemodialysis patients](#) must follow a strict treatment schedule and typically visit a clinic two or three times a week for up to four hours per visit. Ansley worked with patients at a Manhattan dialysis clinic during treatment sessions in the fall and spring semesters.

"Patients are sitting there with a lot of time on their hands," she said. "Some choose to watch TV, read or fall asleep. Others inevitably start to think about their worries in life."

Patients could not move during treatment, so Ansley brought prompts like pictures, games, guided imagery and music. She asked questions to help patients verbally improvise a scene, story or character. Some patients created a detective character, and story themes included death, loneliness and friendship.

"Drama therapy creates a wonderful metaphor and distancing effect for people so that they can talk about their problems," said Sally Bailey, professor and director of the drama therapy program at the university. "They can create characters who are dealing with similar issues and succeed, which gives them hope for themselves. It's empowering and helps them feel more in control of their lives."

Patients completed surveys before and after each session, and a 65-item Profile of Mood States assessment before and after the study. They reported that drama therapy was an enjoyable way to pass the time during treatment and took their mind off of their worries. They also perceived that the therapy reduced their pain and improved their mood.

Ansley gave patients a personalized book of their stories, along with recordings of some of their creative work.

She previously worked for Los Angeles-based Starlight Children's Foundation for its New York City and Midwest chapters as a hospital clown in pediatric intensive care units in New York City and Milwaukee, Wis. Ansley wants to work as a drama therapist with [patients](#) undergoing hemodialysis at a hospital or clinic in Wisconsin.

"Having something to look forward to, discovering a new talent and finding a passion for creativity can change a person's perception of his or her life," Ansley said. "Drama therapy is an invitation to have some fun and discover new possibilities."

Provided by Kansas State University

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