

Supporting the healing inherent in the arts

The bold, colorful landscapes so captured the young man's attention that he left his hospital bed to see them nearly every day. Paul Venezia, 17, who suffers from a chronic skin condition, is a regular inpatient at DHMC. To overcome boredom, he takes walks along the Center's mall, where he came upon the paintings. "They really brighten things up," Venezia said. "It's a nice diversion from TV."

When her husband came for an appointment at DHMC, Sharon Austin of Franconia, N.H., sat listening to the soothing sounds of local pianist Bill Emerson in the Center's rotunda. "I've been sitting here, instead of in the doctor's waiting room, for an hour and a half," Austin said. "The beautiful music takes my mind off the seriousness of my being here."

David Banker, a secretary in DHMC's Intensive Care Nursery, offers crayons and paper to young siblings of the ICN's occupants. These children find comfort and enjoyment in drawing while their parents tend to the infants.

These are just a few of the many people who benefit from the efforts of the DHMC Arts Committee, a volunteer group dedicated to enhancing the hospital environment by providing exposure to art in its many forms. "There is an empirical belief that pleasant environments can have a soothing, calming effect on people," says Robert McCollum, M.D., dean emeritus of DMS and



Bob McCollum, a member of the DHMC Arts Committee, relaxes with some of the manifestations of its work — one of the Audubon prints that adorn the walls of the Medical Center and the Steinway grand that sits in the rotunda.

a founder of the Arts Committee.

Initially, the committee's purpose was to oversee the acquisition and placement of fine art in the new DHMC facility. With representatives from the Hospital, the Clinic, the Medical School, and the community, the group set out to catalog, clean, and move artwork from the old building to the new. They defined their mission to include establishing criteria for the acceptance of artwork as gifts or on loan. The principal consideration is that any art, whether visual or performing, must promote the well-being of all who come to the Medical Center.

Union of art and healing

The union of art and healing dates back to antiquity, when the ancient Greeks sent the sick to theatrical performances. In more

recent times, Roger Ulrich, a professor of architecture at Texas A&M, demonstrated that a positive physical environment decreases recovery time. Since the publication of his study in the mid-1980s, there has been growing awareness that art can and does enhance the healing process.

"We really are on the cutting edge of a national movement," says Kelsey Woodward, DHMC's director of volunteer services and chair of the Arts Committee. "Hospital administrators are just beginning to develop arts programs. We are fortunate to have a very willing and enthusiastic group of volunteers who have been working on our program for years." Woodward is currently president of the Society of Health Care Arts Administrators, a national organization that has grown from six

members in 1990 to 85 today.

In the four years of its existence, DHMC's Arts Committee has greatly expanded its offerings. Encouraged initially by a generous gift from Laurance and Mary Rockefeller of 107 framed Audubon bird prints, the group has worked hard to bring a myriad of artists and performers to the Medical Center. Other notable donations have included a Steinway grand piano, several sculptures, painted murals and ceiling tiles for the pediatric wing, and a significant bequest for arts programming from the late Gertrude Mertens, an artist and longtime benefactor of the Medical School. In addition, local artists display their work at DHMC on a rotating basis, while performers like Bill Emerson volunteer their talents for concerts.

Enhancing humanism

The arts are flourishing at DHMC in still other ways, including in the use of art therapy with psychiatric inpatients.

In addition, DMS was one of six medical schools nationwide chosen for the "Very Special Arts" program, based at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Designed to increase medical students' understanding of the contribution the arts can make to the care of hospitalized children, the program is now in its third year at Dartmouth. "Bringing in artists to work with medical students helps those students connect with their patients and become better communicators," explains Joseph O'Donnell, M.D., who oversees the program. "Art enhances the humanistic aspect of medicine."

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