

Arts for health and wellbeing

Engagement with the arts can make a powerful contribution to a person's mental health and wellbeing. This briefing provides an overview of the ways that NHS Wales is realising this opportunity and improving outcomes for patients.

Key Points

- The arts can help keep you well, aid your recovery, improve your quality of life and support you to live longer.
- Being creative enhances mental health, boosts emotional and psychological wellbeing, helps build self-esteem, mitigates social isolation and loneliness and promotes more cohesive communities, increasing wellbeing among staff in health and social care.
- There are many ways to be creative and it doesn't matter what you do. It can be anything from writing, design, playing music, scrapbooking, pottery, cake decorating, knitting, sewing, woodwork, photography, gardening or dancing.
- Through the Memorandum of Understanding between the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation, we have an excellent opportunity to promote and raise awareness of the benefits of the arts and how being creative can improve mental health and wellbeing.
- To ensure the care received is centred around needs, it is vital that the NHS works collaboratively with colleagues across the public sector and with all partners within communities.



How creativity helps improve and promote mental health and wellbeing

Over recent years, there has been a growing understanding of the impact that taking part in the arts can have on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. By supplementing medicine and care, the arts can improve the health of people who experience mental or physical health problems. Engaging in the arts can promote prevention of disease and build wellbeing. The arts can improve healthcare environments and benefit staff retention and professional development.

Arts and health is a wide-ranging field of activity – there are as many ways in which the work is described as there are types of activity. The creative impulse is fundamental to the experience of being human. This impulse may be expressed through art, craft, creative writing, dance, design, drama, storytelling, film, musicmaking or singing, alone or with others, and we are making more creative use of digital media. We may access art by walking around our cities or heritage sites, visiting concert halls, galleries, museums, theatres or libraries. The act of creation, and our appreciation of it, provides an individual experience that can have positive effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing.

As highlighted in the Welsh NHS Confederations briefing 'Arts, Health and Wellbeing' and the Arts Council of Wales report, 'Arts and Health in Wales: A Mapping Study of Current Activity', creative arts activities have been applied to a broad range of mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, autism, dementia, reducing loneliness, anxiety and isolation and improving quality of life.

A lot of arts in health work happens at grass root levels, in community-based programmes. Participatory arts and crafts activities in community and healthcare settings provide opportunities for people to engage with each other and their own creativity, as well as supporting self-expression. Arts within the community can give rise to significant reductions in loneliness, anxiety, depression and stress.

Arts and creativity is key to mental health because:

- **It's a way of self-expression.** Unexpressed thoughts and feelings can be very damaging and it's important to let them out in a healthy way. As well as allowing you to express your thoughts and feelings, creativity can help you to make sense of them and it can help put things in perspective.
- **It gives you something to focus on.** Creativity can help take the focus away from destructive, negative thoughts. It is a healthy way of channelling negative energy into something positive.
- **It can be enjoyable.** Doing something enjoyable gives you good feelings which help you feel better about yourself.
- **It teaches you to focus on the process.** Creativity can teach you to be mindful and immersed in the present moment.
- **It gives you purpose and meaning.** Creativity gives you something meaningful to do.
- **You can learn something new.** Creativity is an opportunity, for example learning to draw or play a musical instrument, and can help you to build confidence.
- **It can give you a sense of accomplishment.** Accomplishment can come from the process of doing or learning and it's not necessarily about the end result. As a bonus, you may feel a sense of achievement when you create something.
- **It can be a way of connecting with other people.** Doing something that you enjoy is an opportunity to connect and make friends with like-minded people.
- **It is therapeutic.** The benefits of creativity are recognised. There is widespread use of creativity as therapy, for example, art and music therapy.

What sort of thing does arts and health involve?

1. Arts in the healthcare environment:

This includes hospitals, GP surgeries, hospices and care homes.

For the past 30 years, many hospitals have chosen to incorporate artwork into the healthcare environment to improve the experience of patients and staff. The arts create safer, more stimulating, supportive and functional environments in healthcare settings. From architectural design to art on the walls, from access to natural lighting to the inclusion of nature through landscape and healing gardens, the physical environment has a significant impact on reducing patient and caregiver stress, improving health outcomes, enhancing patient safety and overall quality of care, and reducing costs. An attractive and inviting workplace also improves job satisfaction for NHS staff.

The Woodland Walk and Marking Time Sculpture, Bronllys Hospital, Powys Teaching Health Board

The Woodland Walk and Marking Time Sculpture is a newly-fitted permanent feature at Bronllys Hospital that provides an opportunity for patients, visitors and staff to pause and reflect. Patients, visitors, workers and those attending meetings or events are offered a wellbeing break and are encouraged to take a walk through the woodland and consider the thought-provoking sculptural installation.

The walk and sculpture were made possible thanks to a community covenant grant from the Ministry of Defence. Funding alone however did not make this happen and its realisation was due to the hard work and dedication of two local veterans who co-ordinated the project with local volunteers, sculptor Rebecca Buck, local schoolchildren, Health Board staff and others.

Schoolchildren from Mount Street in Brecon, many of whom had parents or grandparents who had served in the military, also helped to create the Marking Time sculpture by making the edging tiles for the Dragon Sculpture plinth.



HeARTh Gallery Llandough, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (UHB)

Oriel yr Aelwyd: The HeARTh Gallery first opened at University Hospital Llandough in 2015. Open daily from 9am – 8pm, the gallery hosts a diverse, rolling programme of exhibitions, changing every four to six weeks, and features work from both emerging and established artists, a variety of community groups and charities, together with staff members, patients and visitors. Exhibitions are designed to provide an opportunity for relaxation and contemplation, and also to offer new perspectives, reduce stigma and stimulate discussion.

The gallery is a unique, contemporary art space situated at the heart of the clinical setting, believed to be the first of its kind in Wales. It provides a unique opportunity to work with artists in commissioning new art in health works for the space.

The HeARTh gallery has mounted over 30 exhibitions since it opened and has invited artists to respond to themes including mental health; breast cancer and experiences of chemotherapy; PTSD; responses to the clinical environment; dementia; perceptions around health, illness and recovery; as well as Wales for Africa health projects, culture and heritage. Pupils from Pencoed Primary School have also exhibited work as part of an Arts Council of Wales Creative Schools project led by artist Haf Weighton, which later toured to the Saatchi Gallery in London. The gallery presents work in a variety of different media including painting, photography, installation, textiles, ceramics, sculpture sound and video. Regular open exhibitions invite staff members, patients, carers, service users and hospital visitors to submit and exhibit work and to be part of the creative process, and to enjoy the benefits of participation in the creative arts. A number of recent exciting projects in the gallery have resulted in the provision of art workshops and creative sessions in other areas of the hospital.

Art features prominently at Hafan y Coed, the new mental health unit where a diverse and eclectic collection of sculpture, ceramics, photographs, prints, poems and paintings can be viewed on a circular walk around the public spaces. In addition, University Hospital Llandough is the regional centre for Paintings in Hospitals in South Wales exhibiting artworks on loan from this diverse collection of almost 4,000 pieces.



2. Participatory arts programmes:

This refers to individual and group arts activities intended to improve and maintain health and wellbeing in health and social care settings and community locations.

Getting involved in the arts provides both social and creative outlets for people who are ill – supporting their mental and emotional recovery, relieving anxiety and decreasing the perception of pain. Many care homes, GP surgeries and hospitals as well as community settings provide opportunities for people to engage with the arts as a tool to improve their wellbeing. In an environment where the patient often feels out of control, the arts can serve as a healing tool, reducing stress and loneliness and providing opportunities for self-expression.

‘Singing for Lung Health’, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (UHB)

Singing for Lung Health is a partnership programme between the Betsi Cadwaladr UHB Arts and Wellbeing team and Pulmonary Rehabilitation team at Wrexham Maelor hospital. The programme provides support to patients with chronic lung disease in North East Wales and is led by an experienced singing teacher, supported by the Technical Instructor for Pulmonary Rehabilitation.

The programme is aimed towards improving people’s ability to cope with chronic respiratory illness by practicing relaxation, developing diaphragmatic breathing and practicing interactive vocal exercises. Participants also benefit from meeting new people and developing new friendships which improves mental wellbeing and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Over 87% of participants said that improvements in their breathing were attributable purely to the singing exercises. Participants also said that their self-confidence had improved since attending the sessions and that general improvements in their health and physical activity levels meant that they were visiting their GP less frequently. Members of the group experienced positive impacts of improved lung health within short timeframes – being able to walk upstairs, having fewer rests and being able to walk longer distances without feeling tired were specifically cited as positive impacts of the classes. Some members of the group have requested that the classes be held more frequently and that additional sessions be held in other locations across the Health Board.



Caban Sgriblio, Powys Teaching Health Board

Caban Sgriblio is an Arts Alive Wales project funded by Children in Need and led by professional writer Emma Beynon. The project provides a tailored programme of creative writing and film-making activities aimed at supporting children from rural areas experiencing poor mental wellbeing. Typically, participants are children who feel isolated and may be expressing negative behaviours as a result. They include young carers, children who have been bereaved and who have experienced abuse. Partners include Health Board mental health teams, local schools, young carers and youth advocacy workers.

Participants engage in a series of weekly workshops where they work individually and collectively in writing, drawing, filming and performance activities. The aim is to provide a friendly environment where children feel able to articulate their thoughts and ideas both orally and on paper and to unlock their potential as young creators.

Children who have attended the Caban Sgriblio sessions have demonstrated improved self-expression; increased self-confidence; improved social interaction skills with peers and adults; and greater pride in their achievements. Staff have also reported that the children feel a greater sense of readiness to participate and have started to develop writing as a support mechanism beyond the life of the project.

Poetry residency at the palliative care unit, Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB)

In March 2018, the palliative care team at Hywel Dda UHB worked with Mererid Hopwood to produce a book of poems and raise awareness of Wythnos Byw Nawr ("Live Now Week"). Mererid is a teacher at University of Wales Trinity Saint David; has won the Chair, Crown and Prose medals at the National Eisteddfod; and has been 'Bardd Plant Cymru' (Welsh language Children's Poet Laureate).

Mererid's time at the care unit allowed patients to share their experiences and emotions in a non-clinical and friendly environment. Mererid composed fourteen poems in total (seven in English, seven in Welsh), which were collated into a pamphlet. Patients enjoyed socialising with Mererid and were keen to see how she translated the feelings of palliative care patients at the unit into her poems. Some patients also wrote their own poems.

In addition to the positive impact on patients, Mererid's time at the palliative care unit also had an impact on staff wellbeing. Staff reported that the sessions had enabled them to get to know the participants as people, rather than patients; had enabled them to feel an even greater sense of pride in their work; and had allowed newer members of the team to learn from colleagues with considerable experience in palliative care.

Music in Hospitals and Care (MiHC), Cardiff and Vale UHB

As well as the 70th birthday of the NHS, 2018 also sees the 70th birthday of Music in Hospitals and Care. To mark this event, MiHC Cymru teamed up with Cardiff and Vale UHB to deliver a special event at University Hospital Llandough.

MiHC is a UK-wide charity that aims to bring interactive live music sessions to patients receiving care or treatment in healthcare settings. Their self-stated key objective is to “make people feel good, one tune at a time”.

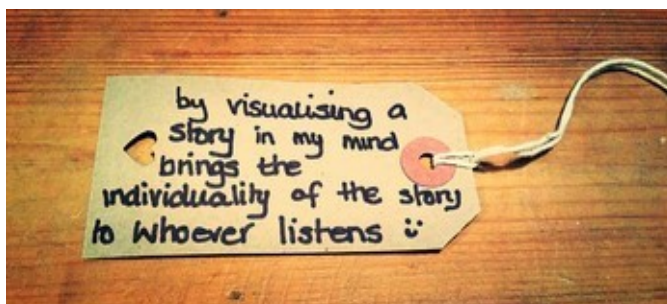
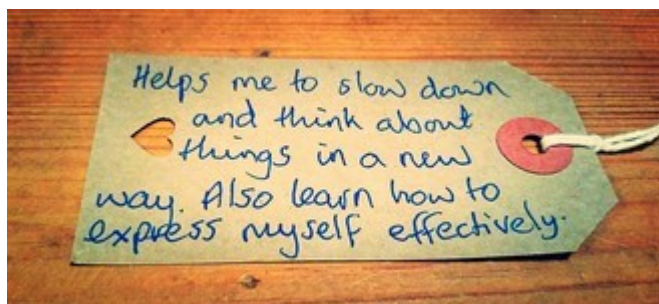
Local musician Heather Jones sang and played guitar to popular songs and encouraged patients at the hospital to sing along and join in. The work of MiHC builds on the growing evidence base that supports the idea that engagement with music has a positive effect on mental wellbeing. Taking part in these sessions allowed participants not only to enjoy themselves and improve their confidence, but to do so collectively by supporting those who may otherwise be isolated to create new memories and share experiences together.



Storytelling for Wellbeing Café, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB

Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB has worked in partnership with the local community to host a series of storytelling sessions for their vulnerable patients. Following the initial run, the Health Board has worked with partners to provide a monthly storytelling for wellbeing café.

The sessions act as an effective way of engaging vulnerable people and supporting them in socialising with others, often with similar lived experiences. Participants are referred from the community mental health team or self refer from the community café where the sessions are held. The group enjoys traditional stories and often starts discussing what they can learn from them. They also share riddles and tell autobiographical stories from their lives. This improves self-confidence and helps them establish closer relationships with other participants and the Health Board staff who facilitate the group.



3. Medical training and Medical Humanities:

This refers to inclusion of the arts in the formation and professional development of health and social care professionals.

For hundreds of years, the arts have played a part in developing the practice of medicine and the understanding of wellbeing. Lots of doctors will now have an arts aspect to their training and many health-workers find that active participation in arts activity helps them with their work. The arts gives medical professionals new tools for improving diagnostic and communication skills and can be used to improve communication of key messages. The arts are also becoming increasingly commonplace in the exploration of ethical issues in medicine.

Staff development and wellbeing, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB

Staff wellbeing and engagement

A staff choir runs at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd to enhance staff wellbeing. The weekly sessions lead to patient engagement in a variety of settings including performing at special events and ward-based bedside singing.

Staff training (healthcare workers, nurses, occupational therapists)

Currently in development, a staff training programme, CREATIVE CARE, is for healthcare staff who may have a role in running activities for patients and wish to develop skills in delivering arts activities and workshops.

Relationships with universities

A partnership with Wrexham Glyndŵr University has resulted in the launch of a new joint research project focusing on Training and Development in Arts in Health. Undertaken by a PhD Student in Residence at the Health Board, the aim of the research is to embed the arts within existing healthcare structures at Betsi Cadwaladr UHB through the training of artists and health care practitioners.



Staff wellbeing training through theatre, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB

In March 2018, the Performing Medicine team at Abertawe Bro Morgannwg delivered two taster sessions for staff from the Mental Health & Learning Disability Unit. Each session was attended by twenty staff from across the range of roles including healthcare support workers, psychologists and a service director. The session gave a taste of drama techniques that can help healthcare staff take more care of their own health and manage their stress levels.

The feedback was extremely positive and the Health Board has since received Arts Council funding for a one-year project working on three elderly mental health wards. Swansea University will be conducting an external evaluation of the project. The Health Board hopes that this will lead to further research and, if it is shown to be successful, an extension of the project to all NHS Wales staff.

Performing Medicine is a project pioneered by Suzy Willson, Director of the London-based theatre company Clod Ensemble. They have worked with a number of the teaching hospitals in London to develop a framework called 'Circle of Care'. The framework shows how care can be a resource that flows in many directions to support staff and patients rather than a uni-directional transaction that can quickly run dry.

Quotes from participants:

"I enjoyed the session. I think it can be easy for these important skills to be neglected or forgotten about, but they are so important in our connection with ourselves and others, and how we can care for and communicate with each other".

"Very different to usual training sessions and keen to explore this method of learning further".

Great! Helped me be more aware of non-verbal communication and what we may be communicating to patients".

"I would recommend this session to Health Board staff as a whole - much needed. I hope that there is success in implementing everything covered as it would benefit staff and patients".



4. Arts on Prescription:

Part of social prescribing, this involves people experiencing psychological or physical distress being referred (or referring themselves) to engage with the arts in the community including galleries, museums and libraries.

Arts on prescription schemes provide arts and creative activities for participants, usually for people experiencing mental health problems and social isolation. Social prescribing is part of a wider movement that signifies a shift from traditional top-down models of care delivered in hospitals and GP surgeries to a non-medical, more networked approach by placing the patient at the centre of their care, promoting independence and personal responsibility, and contributing to the common good. There is strong evidence that a social prescribing approach to treatment that integrates the arts increases self-esteem and confidence, supports a greater sense of control and empowerment, improves psychological wellbeing and reduces anxiety and depression.

Arts from the Armchair (AFTA), Betsi Cadwaladr UHB

A collaboration between Betsi Cadwaladr UHB and Theatr Clwyd (led by Creative Well AHWB Programme), this project aims to provide a positive, creative and participant-led experience, with workshops and performances facilitated by professional arts practitioners within a theatre context.

AFTA supports patients and their carers to design activities which help in the management of a life-changing prognosis. It avoids the risk of isolation and loss of meaningful social interaction. Participants are directly referred to the project through the Community Mental Health and Learning Disability Team Memory Clinic. This ensures a clearly governed and appropriately delivered experience for all.

The group meets weekly at Theatr Clwyd and engages in a wide range of arts-based workshop activities led by a professional creative producer. The aim is to engage everyone's interest and intellectual faculties through performance activities. Each week, different practitioners including actors, musicians, costume makers, lighting and sound technicians, scene painters etc, join the group to share and encourage active involvement with the live performance processes. It aims to provide an opportunity for creative experiences in a safe, supported and structured way and promote wellbeing through improved engagement. The content of the sessions emerges from the activities which are taking place within the Theatr Clwyd building. Creative sessions are often tailored to participants' personal experiences.



Creative Wellbeing Social Prescribing pilot, Cwm Taf UHB

Voluntary Arts Wales is working in partnership with Artis Community, Valleys Steps and local arts groups in the Cwm Taf area on a social prescribing project. The aim is to explore how people with low-level mental health problems might benefit from being prescribed creative activities to help maintain good mental wellbeing.

Participants in the arts activities - which include singing, dancing, visual arts and crafts - are asked to report anonymously on their sense of wellbeing over a six-week period. The project is using this feedback to determine whether – and the degree to which – active and regular participation in the arts demonstrates a sustained benefit in reported mental wellbeing.

Initial feedback has been very positive, and the intention is to demonstrate that people experiencing social isolation and those at risk of developing mental health problems can be ‘prescribed’ community-based creative activities as a preventative measure or complement to medication.

Valleys Steps, a mental health charity, was established with a Wales Wellbeing Bond, so the partners are also exploring the considerations for an arts-based manifestation of the Wellbeing Bond.



Inside Out Cymru, Aneurin Bevan UHB

Inside Out Cymru is part of the Gwent Mental Health Consortium and funded directly by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

Working in collaboration with partners Mind, Hafal, Growing Space and CMIG, Inside Out Cymru recruits and supports artists to deliver projects and arts activities that promote good mental health and wellbeing across Gwent. Workshops are open to the general public, but participants with mental health issues are particularly welcomed.

Theatr Clwyd Social Prescription, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB

In partnership with South Flintshire GPs, Theatr Clwyd is embarking on a new social prescription initiative based on providing a number of free tickets to all of Theatr Clwyd’s public performances for referred patients. This will include any public event held at the theatre including drama, musicals, dance, comedy, cinema and public art.

5. Arts Co-ordinators:

This refers to drama, music and visual arts activities offered to individuals, usually in a clinical setting, by practitioners working within Health Boards in Wales.

There are currently seven Arts and Health Co-Ordinator posts across five Health Boards - six of these are part-time. A further 17 NHS posts are reported to include some ongoing element of arts and health work within their role, and there is evidence that volunteers have also been working with some Health Boards on similar projects.

The work can include developing projects in primary and community care; building art projects into health care buildings and environments; music in hospitals; storytelling and patient story programmes; dance programmes; integrating the arts into education, training, professional development; and staff training.

Work in the future

In September 2017, the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is an opportunity to develop joint areas of work that contribute to a shared goal of improving awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and wellbeing. The agreed areas of work will include advancing good practice; promoting collaboration, co-ordinating and disseminating research, and working together to identify how arts can contribute to people's health and wellbeing. There is a need to scale-up the work that is already happening and increase public awareness and understanding of the role of arts in health.

How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on any of the issues raised in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Policy and Public Affairs Manager** at

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The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards and three NHS Trusts.

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