



Arts in Health Programs are proven to change patients' lives as they engage the creative process through various mediums including writing, drawing, painting, and coloring.

For Biviana Franco, Feel Beautiful Today's founder and president, the need for patients to participate in creative activities without the help of facilitators became increasingly evident the more she visited hospitals bringing interactive Arts and Health programs to patients. With two

hour windows of time and limited resources, many patients who wished to participate could not. Those who did participate often asked when the program would be offered again. She saw countless patients, especially children, hospital-bound and fighting boredom, feelings of loneliness, and depression. Thus, Through My Window and Luna are Arts in Health programs designed to address real problems in the healthcare industry, programs tailored specifically for cancer patients with their weaknesses and disabilities due to treatment in mind.

Writer Thomas Merton said, "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time." There is a growing body of research pointing to the physiological, mental, and emotional benefits of creating art. Participating in an activity that stimulates flow, a state of complete concentration on the work at hand, not only activates a relaxation response but excretes dopamine in the brain¹. Improved mood and decreased anxiety can result in better responses to traditional treatment and shorter hospital stays². So what may seem like a simple craft is actually a well-planned intervention made with the intentions of providing a space for patients to explore their mental and emotional health and process in a safe environment what they may not have been able to communicate otherwise.

This is achieved through various creative activities including painting and decorating a picture frame, writing stories or positive thoughts, coloring designed cards, and drawing pictures that reflect the patient's reality. But Through My Window and Luna do not only provide the opportunity to participate in active art. Feel Beautiful Today wrote a story as well as had two Atlanta natives write original songs for patients to access at any time on their website. The effects of passive art on a patient's healing journey is just as impactful as participating in the creative process; therefore, Through My Window and Luna represent a total, encompassing program that meets the multifaceted needs a patient possesses.

Perhaps actress Stella Adler said it best when she said, "Life beats down and crushes the soul, and art reminds you that you have one." While traditional medical treatments are helping cancer patients live longer, Arts in Health programs are helping patients truly live. Feel Beautiful Today wants to be a front runner in the industry helping to provide programs that facilitate the mental and emotional health needed to live a full life. Without Arts in Health programs like Through My Window and Luna, patients are more likely to carry the invisible pain of cancer with them into remission and miss the beauty of life in diagnosis.

¹ Gutman, SA, and VP Schindler. "The Neurological Basis Of Occupation." *Occupational Therapy International* 14.2 (2007): 71-85. *CINAHL Plus with Full Text*. Web. 24 Jan. 2015.

² Stuckey, Heather L., and Jeremy Nobel. "The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature." *American Journal of Public Health* 100.2 (2010): 254-263. *PMC*. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.