

# Why art therapy belongs in hospices

A briefing for hospice leaders | Autumn 2025



**This  
is art  
therapy**



## How are you meeting psychological pain in your hospice?

Psychological distress can be a barrier to managing other symptoms such as pain, breathlessness and fatigue.

This briefing outlines how art therapy can:

1. Offer skilled psychological support for service users and their families
2. Alleviate distress and suffering
3. Enable people to express what they may not be able to put into words
4. Be delivered flexibly, at different scales and in different settings
5. Help reduce staff burnout

## What is art therapy?

Art therapy is an established form of psychotherapy, delivered by trained art therapists (also known as art psychotherapists).

Art therapy uses art as the primary mode of expression, alongside talking with an art therapist. It aims to reduce distress and improve social, emotional and mental health by promoting insight, self-compassion and a sense of agency and self-worth.

**What is art therapy video**

## Why offer art therapy, and not just art?

While arts and crafts activities can support wellbeing, art therapists are trained and skilled psychotherapists.

During art therapy, a person is supported by an art therapist to use art to express and articulate often complex thoughts and feelings through art making.

In the UK, the title art therapist and art psychotherapist are protected by law. All UK art therapists must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

## Alleviating distress and psychological suffering

Research suggests many people can find art therapy helpful when approaching the end of life. People have reported decreased distress or increased wellbeing after an art therapy session.

**"Often on a busy ward, we only look at the physical. Whereas what is really causing a lot of suffering is facing loss, leaving people behind, losing identity.**

**I think art psychotherapy is a tool to get to the heart of that total pain or suffering."**

Dr Ros Taylor MBE, Medical Director  
Harlington Hospice

## When words are not enough

Art therapists can enable service users and their families to explore and express what they may not be able to say in words — about their legacy, identity, grief and meaning.

This could be including:

- at the end of life
- when living with a life-limiting illness
- during a diagnosis process
- with bereavement

**"I finally got to speak about things I hadn't been able to speak about before."**

– Service user, Keech Hospice

## Meeting people where they are

Art therapy can be flexible, mobile and adaptable.

Art therapy can be delivered:

- at the bedside
- in outpatient groups
- in the community or at home
- online

Art therapists can also tailor sessions for people with physical limitations and fatigue, cognitive or sensory impairments.



## Supporting staff to reduce burnout

A 2025 randomised controlled trial published in British Medical Journal Public Health found that six weekly sessions of group art therapy can significantly reduce burnout risk and mental distress in health care professionals (HCPs) from different professional backgrounds in acute hospital settings.

Previous studies of various interventions, including discussion groups and cognitive therapy, have failed to demonstrate a change in burnout compared with no intervention.

[Read the research paper](#)

[Listen to the BMJ podcast](#)

# 98%

found the group art therapy sessions helpful or very helpful

# 100%

would recommend them to colleagues

# What could art therapy look like in your hospice?

Art therapists are already working in hospices across the UK. For example in:

- running art therapy sessions for staff
- working in bereavement services
- providing online art therapy groups for families and carers
- being an integrated part of a multi-disciplinary team
- commissioned freelance HCPC-registered art therapists

## Get in touch

If you'd like to find out more about providing art therapy in palliative care, you can email [hello@baat.org](mailto:hello@baat.org).

The British Association of Art Therapists is the professional membership body for art therapists in the UK.

## References

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- Lin MH et al. (2012) [Art therapy for terminal cancer patients in a hospice palliative care unit in Taiwan](#). *Palliative and Supportive Care*
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## More resources

### Read

- Research evidence: Art therapy in end of life care
- Research evidence: Art therapy with people affected by cancer

### Watch

- Josie's story: group art therapy for adults in a hospice
- S reflects on her art therapy journey