

Unit 3: Reverse Outline Assignment

A Modern Prescription for Poetry

Poetry Therapy is a modern treatment for illnesses that have been thoroughly developed in the past decade. This therapy is an instrument of healing for breast cancer patients as it positively affects the patient's emotional and psychological well-being. The benefits of this therapy are that it reduces depressive symptoms, emphasizes confidence, and helps patients gain control over their fear of death through group therapy.

One benefit of Poetry Therapy is that it decreases depressive symptoms in breast cancer patients. Pouran Daboui, an instructor at the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, has published a vast array of medical journals. In his article, "Hope and Mood Improvement in Women with Breast Cancer Using Group Poetry Therapy," Daboui and colleagues insist that depression is a serious condition associated with breast cancer as women are forced to manage these feelings in addition to their cancer treatment (169). The same authors contend: "Negative psychological traits such as ... depression ... were common in ... women and the majority had no hope for their future and no motivations to set goals for their life" (169). Furthermore, Daboui's research team notes that depression causes women to feel emotionally numb while trying to cope with the challenges of their disease, and in severe cases, some may not care whether they live or die (169). A breast cancer patient with depression struggles with feeling helpless, lonely, anxious, and worthless, trying to navigate the stresses of living with cancer while juggling these symptoms of depression. Hence, a method to diminish depressive emotions is through writing poetry as creative writing improves hopefulness. Ingrid Tegnér, a Master of Social Work and poetry therapist, has conducted several studies on this topic. In her essay, "Evaluating the Use of Poetry to Improve Well-Being and Emotional Resilience in Cancer Patients", Tegnér and collaborators discovered that "the discussion of poetry and ... creative writing has been found to benefit cancer patients ... by helping individuals ... express their emotions" (122). The method of creative writing through composing poetry, letters, and journals releases challenging emotions which women find difficult to communicate. The same journalists affirm that these blocked emotions stem from depressive symptoms and suppressing these emotions is linked to higher mood disturbances (122).

Using poetry as an intervention technique to manage depression can enhance a patient's emotional resilience by engaging in creative writing, which improves hopefulness. However, here an opponent might validly argue that this therapy does not decrease depressive symptoms in breast cancer patients, this treatment only aims to manage these unwanted feelings. Medical Doctor Olga Nyssen has written numerous biomedical journals on this issue. In her article, "Does Therapeutic Writing Help People with Long-Term Conditions?", Nyssen's research group concludes that through creative writing, Poetry Therapy only provides the opportunity for women to convey their feelings, it does not reduce depressive symptoms (6). Thus, Nyssen and associates argue the following: "[Creative writing] does not seem to have much of an effect on [decreasing depression symptoms]" (6). Therefore, there is uncertainty regarding the clinical effectiveness of creative writing as it does not offer a method to ease depressive symptoms. While there is merit in this objection, what is overlooked is that Poetry Therapy recognizes that women with breast cancer struggle with their mental health and depression while undergoing

treatment. Through writing poetry, women can combat their depression by expressing their negative emotions, which will result in increased hopefulness and manageable depressive symptoms.

Another major problem faced by breast cancer patients is the changes to their body image due to their cancer treatment. According to Brunet and Price, “[women undergo] physical changes [such as] scarring/disfigurement, weight gain, ... hair loss, [and] ... loss of the breast(s) from a mastectomy ... that can influence women’s body-related thoughts [and] have a negative impact on women’s body image” (2). Thus, these changes to a patient’s body fabricate a negative body image as women grapple to understand these adjustments. Additionally, Brunet and Price illustrate that having a negative self-image leads to physical and psychological complications for patients such as despair, anxiety, fatigue, and depression (2). Hence, a negative body image that stems from changes to a woman’s body through cancer treatment is detrimental to their mental and physical health. Thus, Poetry Therapy seeks to combat body image issues in breast cancer patients through listening to poetry which increases confidence. Rosemary Reilly, a member of the Faculty of Applied Human Sciences at Concordia University, has published prolifically in medical journals. In her article, “Using Found Poetry to Illuminate the Growth of Women with Breast Cancer Engaging in Art Therapy,” Reilly’s research partners record that this therapy encourages women to listen to a poem and react to the literature by verbally expressing their negative emotions surrounding their changing body (213). Reilly and coworkers make the following observation: “Poems allow [women] to access deeper insights into ... what it means to be a woman navigating breast cancer: the ache of hair loss; the feelings of grief, isolation, and emotional pain; and the possibility of death” (213). The same authors deduce that Poetry Therapy emphasizes confidence as listening to poetry provides a new outlook on their current circumstances and allows them to express their emotions (213). By reacting to poetry, women gain confidence as they can self-reflect on their perception of their changing body and understand what it means to be a woman with breast cancer.

Yet here it must be admitted that this therapy does not have enough longitudinal research to produce concrete data that poetry emphasizes confidence in patients who have body image issues. Nyssen and collaborators demand that “despite the development of the programme theory ... there is too much uncertainty surrounding too many aspects of [listening to poetry] to enable a firm recommendation to be made about the benefits” (6). Nyssen et al. claim that the benefits of reading poetry are speculative, not factual, as these advantages are not guaranteed in women who participate in this treatment (6). Since Poetry Therapy is a modern treatment, there are not enough studies to support the assertion that it benefits breast cancer patients who have a negative body image. Nevertheless, when we look at the bigger picture, new treatments would not be discovered if they were not tested on patients. Poetry Therapy is a modern treatment; hence, there will not be sufficient data to support the advantages it has on emphasizing confidence in breast cancer patients. However, many doctors have recorded the same benefits, which makes the research of listening to poetry ongoing.

Furthermore, the greatest benefit of Poetry Therapy is through reading poetry, as women can express their emotions surrounding death. According to Reilly’s research unit, “Individuals who face life-threatening illness are more likely to become cognitively engaged with

fundamental existential questions about death” (202). Hence, the psychological damage caused by cancer is harmful to breast cancer patients as they constantly live with the fear of death. The same writers illuminate that to combat this fear, therapists choose poems related to death and note the verbal and non-verbal cues, such as a change in tone or facial expression, presented by the patient while they read the literature (202). Through reading poetry, women can verbally express their feelings about death and learn to gain control over their fear by expressing their emotions. Additionally, Group Poetry Therapy is a method to treat breast cancer as patients form connections and feel secure through relationships formed with other women in solidarity. Authors Tegnér and colleagues observed that by reading poetry in a group setting, women form friendships with other patients who relate to their emotions surrounding death (128). Thus, the safe atmosphere group therapy builds improves patient health as they feel supported by others who are also trying to navigate cancer. Research conducted by Tegner et al. reported, “In a supportive, group atmosphere, ... [poetry] offers [women] a sense of meaning and community as ... participants are provided with a means of creatively expressing their feelings” (128). The positive connections formed through reading poetry with a group allow women to share their emotions regarding death and this creates security in patients knowing that others identify with their struggles.

Conversely, an opponent could justifiably argue that meeting with breast cancer patients in a range of stages increases the fear of death in individuals who participate in Group Poetry Therapy. Tegnér and coworkers demonstrate that witnessing how cancer has impacted the health of women diminishes hopefulness in those who are in the preliminary stages (122). The same investigators conclude: “There is some evidence to suggest that negative effects may predict treatment response and survival” (122). Group therapy harms patient response to cancer treatment as this heightened fear of death reduces their hope of survival. Here, the opposition fails to take seriously that group therapy creates community in women with breast cancer through reading poetry. By meeting with other patients, women can express the harsh reality of living with cancer to other women who understand their emotions. Supportive group therapy creates friendship and security in patients as they meet with others to express their emotions through reading literature.

Overall, Poetry Therapy has made remarkable advances in the healthcare system as numerous doctors are advising this treatment to their cancer patients. This therapy decreases depressive symptoms, promotes confidence, and assists women in achieving control over their fear of death. Positive results have been documented all over the world and more healthcare professionals are using Poetry Therapy to combat breast cancer.