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High Anxiety in Pediatric Oncology Patients? What about Art Therapy?

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Anxiety and depression are becoming more prevalent in the pediatric population today. In addition to the general pediatric population experiencing an increased risk of mental illness, children with an oncology related diagnosis have an even heightened risk. Most pediatric oncology patients reported fear or worry daily, which is cited to be most severe when they had an appointment or went to the hospital for a fever. It is imperative we discover interventions to lessen the anxiety and depression pediatric oncology patients experience daily. A literature review revealed conclusive interventions have not been determined. The purpose of this research is to identify if implementing art therapy in all pediatric oncology patient care plans will decrease reported anxiety and depression. There are many forms of art therapy such as drawing, writing, storytelling, or playing games. Multiple art forms are available enabling us to tailor the art therapy intervention to the preferences of the individual. This experiment will be quasi-experimental. The children on the pediatric oncology unit will be surveyed on how they are feeling and any signs of anxiety for three days before therapy initiation. We will utilize the PHQ-A (Patient Health Questionnaire-Adolescent) which has been adapted to screen and monitor the level of depression in children and SCARED (Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders) which screens for anxiety in children. Therapy will be initiated by allowing the children two hours each day to partake in art therapy. The participants will be surveyed daily with the PHQ-A and SCARED to determine if art therapy decreased their anxiety and depression level. Additionally, we will use this data to determine efficacy in maintaining and possibly continuing to reduce the levels. If art therapy is determined as an effective intervention, we will move forward in implementing these therapies into regular routines with pediatric oncology patients.