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Harbor Hospice to offer patients new ways of expressing feelings through the guidance of an art therapist

February 9, 2021, West Michigan – Amy Hamman is enthusiastic about the long-recognized benefits of art therapy and is thrilled that Harbor Hospice has engaged her to offer the specialized mental health practice to patients this spring.

“While it is natural for people to begin looking more inward at the end of their life, that process can be accompanied by a sense of isolation and depression,” explains Hamman, who has worked in the field for 11 years. “Sometimes patients don’t know how to explain their feelings in words, but they can do it through artistic expression or by making things.”

Hamman has observed that hospice patients can also become overwhelmed with a sense of losing control of things around them.

“Art therapy, and the process of making art, can give them back a sense of control,” she says. “Creative expression encourages people to move and be active to the extent they are able, and it can help them get engaged and out of their bubble. I guide them, and they take me on their journey.”

While using art as a means of communication, expression, and even diagnosis has been documented going back centuries, art therapy became a publicly accepted therapeutic approach for addressing issues such as depression and anxiety in the mid-1900s in both the US and Europe.

Hamman works individually with each of her patients and offers them several kinds of art media to explore including paints, markers, and clay. One project some gravitate to begins with an empty box they can decorate and fill with photos, mementoes, and documents that are meaningful to them.

“Working on that box can help a patient review their life and reminisce,” explains Hamman, “It can bring reconciliation and closure, or it can be a legacy they leave for their loved ones.”

Patients don’t need any artistic experience or natural artistic ability for art therapy to be helpful, and there is no pressure to complete a project, stresses Hamman. In fact, patients often benefit simply from the *process* of making art, she says.

Hamman received her master’s degree in education specializing in art therapy from Wayne State University and is board certified nationally as an art therapist. She has worked with people of all ages in a variety of situations, from convicted felons to children traumatized by their experience in foster care or juvenile systems. Recently she moved to a home on eight acres in West Olive where the natural world around her helps inspire her work.

For more information, contact Harbor Hospice at 231.728.3442 or 1.800.497.9559.

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