Patients undergoing radiation therapy struggle with many physical and emotional stressors. Many ways to help patients cope with stressors and improve the treatment experience are found in the literature, including humor, art, entertainment, and hospitality. At H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center, the radiation therapy nurses and staff members use entertainment in an annual patient appreciation day event as one way to give back to the patients.

Dianne Cirillo, RN, BSN, MS, is a radiation oncology clinic nurse at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute in Tampa, FL. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article. The author did not receive honoraria for this work. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the author or editorial staff. Cirillo can be reached at dianne.cirillo@moffitt.org, with copy to editor at CIONEditor@ons.org.

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Many changes have occurred in health care over the years that attempt to improve the experiences of patients struggling with illness. Humor, art, entertainment, hospitality, and complementary medicine are all strategies to improve the way patients cope with their disease and treatment (Ziqi, Robson, & Hollis, 2013). Healthcare team members may use many of these strategies to show appreciation for what patients are going through. By using these strategies, patients can be distracted from their challenges and experience less anxiety (Trevisani et al., 2010). One of the goals in the radiation department at H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, FL, is to assist the patient with having more enjoyment during his or her time of stress.

Oncology healthcare team members often receive recognition from patients and their caregivers to let them know how much they appreciate the care received. At H. Lee Moffitt, nurses and the multidisciplinary team host an annual patient appreciation day on October 31 to improve patients’ experience in radiation oncology. To show appreciation for the patients in the radiation oncology department, the staff work together to transform the department into a fantasy land, using lighthearted themes, costumes, props, decorations, and treats.

The patients and staff enjoy this event, as evidenced by the smiles and laughter throughout the department. Studies show that patients appreciate and use humor as a way to help with stressful situations (Christie & Moore, 2005). Patients also report satisfaction with entertainment being incorporated into the healthcare experience (Ziqi et al., 2013). Entertainment is a big part of the patient appreciation day.

The theme of the most recent event was Radiation Cinemas. The radiation therapy areas in the facility are divided into several zones based on the type of treatment machine. As patients came for treatment, they found the area had been transformed with movie-related themes. For example, the check-in staff dressed in white shirts, red vests, and bow ties and remade their zone into the theater box office. Other staff members followed suit and transformed treatment areas into movie sets. Patients were given movie tickets and popcorn bags loaded with treats. Each zone represented different movies, such as 101 Dalmatians, A League of Their Own,
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, Ghostbusters, and Back to the Future. Staff entertained patients with costumes from each of these movies.

In addition, the department collected donations and made treat bags for the patients. A dietitian was consulted and gave ideas regarding items to be included in the bags that would be beneficial based on the disease site. For example, soft snacks, such as pudding cups, were included for patients undergoing head and neck radiation. Each patient also received a bottle of water with the bags as a healthy drink.

The patients and caregivers are very gracious and appreciative of the care they receive, despite the challenges they face on a daily basis. This type of event and use of humor can help with anxiety during treatment (Rose, Spencer, & Rausch, 2013). Items of positive distraction help with positive psychological and psychological outcomes (Ziqi et al., 2013). An event such as patient appreciation day in the radiation department is a helpful distraction from the usual challenges for a patient with cancer. The use of humor improves coping and is a welcome intervention for patients with cancer (Rose et al., 2013). In addition to showing the patients how much the staff appreciates them and enjoys taking care of them, employees enjoy this day as well. Having a fun activity improves morale and is a wonderful way to celebrate the patients and bring the multidisciplinary team together. Planning and preparation have already begun for the next patient appreciation day, and it will surely be a great time for patients, families, and employees in the radiation oncology department.

References