

Origami Creations Bring Peace and Hope to Patients in Transplantation Unit

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Sadako Sasaki was at home when the atomic bomb was dropped near her home on Hiroshima Island, Japan. She was a toddler, full of energy and full of life. No one knew what was to come.

Her story is like so many patients who find they have a form of cancer. One day they are living life, feeling fine, even sweating the small stuff. The next day, they hear the “C” word: cancer. Sadako was a healthy little girl who went from running on the playground to a hospital bed with less than a year to live. Until you have firsthand experience, no one really knows what that must feel like.

One portion of the Comprehensive Cancer Care Program at Presbyterian/St. Luke’s (P/SL) Hospital in Denver, CO, is the bone marrow transplantation (BMT) unit. This unit is a sterile environment that becomes home for weeks, sometimes months, for patients with cancer who have had an allogeneic transplantation. Patients’ lives change forever in ways almost unimaginable.

As a part of treatment, the Healing Arts Program was developed for patients to explore creativity as a way of healing the emotional stress of illness. The unknown medical procedures and unknown outcome can be frightening; patients have a lot of time to process information. The mind needs the creative outlet as a way to bring back a sense of control and normalcy during the hospital experience.

“When I’m creating, I find moments of peace and comfort, a welcome feeling when all else seems out of control,” says Kat, a former patient in the BMT unit.

The Healing Arts Program caters to the individual and his or her unique creative needs, providing tools for use at any time of the day. Available tools include many



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Patients, family, and staff in the bone marrow transplantation unit in the Comprehensive Cancer Care Program at Presbyterian/St. Luke’s Hospital in Denver, CO, created more than 1,600 origami cranes to symbolize hope and peace. The cranes were displayed on four panels representing the four seasons, including the one pictured here, which represented spring.

different forms of art, including drawing, stenciling, and coloring using various types of media.

It was through the Healing Arts Program that patients learned about Sadako Sasaki, who suffered from leukemia. Sadako’s best friend came to visit while she was in the hospital and folded a gold piece of paper into a paper crane. She told Sadako about a Japanese legend: Make 1,000 cranes and you will be granted a wish. Sadako made

origami cranes each day after that visit and wrote on the wings, “I will write peace on your wings and you will fly around the world.” Sadako passed away on October 25, 1955, after making 644 cranes. Her friends folded the rest and buried 1,000 cranes with Sadako. Many lessons can be learned from Sadako’s legacy, but the biggest is that of hope for the future.

In addition to the message of hope, the crane-making process itself is healing

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