



## Take Art

### Opening a gallery in a cancer center?

by **Barbara McAneny, MD**

**A**t first glance, an art gallery within a cancer treatment center may seem like an odd fit. However, bringing an art gallery into our nine-physician oncology-hematology group has benefited everyone. Local artists get space to display their works on our walls. Our patients and their families find themselves surrounded by original works of art as they undergo treatment and cancer care. Staff has the pleasure of a work environment enhanced by art.

#### **An Artful Idea**

The idea to incorporate an art gallery into our new treatment facility began back in 2000, when our oncology-hematology group started planning the New Mexico Cancer Center (NMCC). We planned to build a 35,000-square-foot treatment center because our older offices lacked sufficient space. In addition, our practice was growing and we were expanding the scope of our services to include radiation therapy and diagnostic imaging.

Working with our architects, we realized that we had an incredible opportunity to design the ideal workspace. We could create a center that housed a full range of cancer treatment options under one roof and lay out the building to offer support and resources for each staff member and department.

Best of all, we could design the center based on the needs and wishes of our patients. To better understand their concerns, we asked them about their priorities. We recognized that in an ideal world, none of our patients would need to come here. It came as little surprise to learn that our patients consistently told us that they wanted to come to an environment that made them feel better.

For instance, our patients told us that they wanted a sense of space, so they wouldn't feel cramped or confined during their visits. They wanted light-filled rooms, rather than dark, claustrophobic areas. They asked for uplifting colors and large windows with views of the New Mexico landscape. It became clear to us that our patients, in the midst of their difficult battle, were looking for a place that offered them inspiration, comfort, and hope.

As an avid art collector, I recognized that showcasing art at our center could play a significant role. Our budget, however, made purchasing original works of quality art too prohibitive. As a self-funded organization, our medical practice simply could not afford to buy the kind of art that could offer our patients the optimism and beauty that we sought to provide.

Fortunately, the Southwest is blessed with an active art community, and many artists often produce more work than the local galleries can exhibit. Our new center would have ample wall space. Why not use our walls to showcase the works of the many talented local artists who sought additional exhibit space?

However, if our space was to serve as a gallery, we wanted to ensure that the situation would benefit our patients. To facilitate this, we established the New Mexico Cancer Center Foundation for our patients. Currently, 10 percent of the proceeds from all sold artwork is tax deductible and goes to the NMCC Foundation.

#### **Patients Benefit**

The NMCC Foundation's charter is to help patients who cannot afford the extra costs incurred during cancer treatment, such as childcare,

transportation, and lodging for out-of-town patients. Thus far, donations have helped our patients who cannot work pay mortgage or rent; helped them fix their cars; and bought food for those who must decide between drugs and groceries. None of the funds goes towards drugs or patient copayments. In other words, the money raised is only for non-medical expenses.

To manage the gallery, we hired a well-known local arts curator, who had long-standing relationships with many celebrated local artists. Every two to three months, approximately one-third of the art pieces are exchanged for new works of art, so that our patients and staff are constantly treated to new and original work.

We invite you to visit NMCC to see the range of original work, which includes paintings, photographs, mixed media, sculpture, collages, and other types of innovative artwork. To date, we have showcased the works of dozens of prominent local artists, including Russell Hamilton, Kim Antun, Claudia Baragiola, and Nancy Day.

However, we have noticed one drawback to having a gallery. Instead of finding the patients sitting in the waiting room comparing symptoms, the staff has to retrieve them as they wander down the halls and admire the art.

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*Barbara McAneny, MD, is a medical oncologist and hematologist and CEO of The New Mexico Cancer Center in Albuquerque, N.M. The artwork at the NMCC is shown by appointment. Please call ArtReach, 505.822.8900, to set up a visit. Proceeds from all sales benefit the lower-income patients via the New Mexico Cancer Center Foundation.*