

An abstract painting featuring a central heart shape. The heart is filled with vibrant red and orange colors, surrounded by thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, yellow, and green. The overall composition is dynamic and colorful, with a focus on emotional expression through art.

# An Artful Impact on Cancer Care



## *Engaging professional artists as part of the cancer care team*

**S**amaritan Health Services, a not-for-profit regional health network, brings together five community hospitals, 80 physician clinics, and health insurance plans to provide care for the residents of Oregon's Mid-Willamette Valley and central Oregon coast.

Over the past decade, the arts have become an integral part of the culture of our largely rural health system. Professional artists work one-on-one with patients and family members at the bedside; musicians perform on wards and in public areas; and the environment is enriched by commissioned art and award-winning healing gardens. Patients and family members are also able to participate in artist-led activities during one-time events (e.g., mural creation) or multiclass series (e.g., art groups for cancer survivors). These adjunctive services, occasionally available in large urban hospitals, are even less frequently found in smaller rural hospitals. It is an explicit goal of Samaritan Health Services that those who live in non-urban communities have access to the same high-quality treatment and compassionate patient-centered care as those who live in urban communities; this includes equitable access to the healing properties of the arts.

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### **ArtsCare**

In the past ten years or so, Samaritan Health Services has grown its ArtsCare program from a small ad hoc committee led by staff committed to the value of the arts in healthcare settings into a formal program led by a full-time coordinator. This comprehensive program is guided by a strategic plan that is updated every three years and a detailed work plan that is updated annually. Our

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ArtsCare Advisory Group meets quarterly and provides valuable input regarding program growth and direction.

ArtsCare is unique in its breadth of services for patients, visitors, and employees, including live music and the visual arts, one-on-one services, group activities, commissioned art, and healing gardens. Professional artists and musicians (hereafter referred to as “artists”) are paid to facilitate the art activities and special events and/or perform.

Music and visual arts are integrated into monthly health education and support groups. Periodically, participatory art projects bring together healthcare providers, patients, visitors, and hospital staff in the creation of large art pieces, such as murals and mosaics, that, when completed, are displayed in public areas.

In 2017, 25 professional artists and musicians provided more than 2,210 hours of arts-related services in Samaritan facilities, engaging 10,637 patients, 6,761 family and friends, and 10,503 staff with the arts. Over the past 12 months alone, 27,900 people experienced the arts through ArtsCare.

In this article we describe how ArtsCare delivers services aimed at improving the experiences of all those who have been affected by cancer—those who are in treatment for cancer or have completed treatment, their support network of family members and friends, and their healthcare providers.



(Top and bottom) During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, ArtsCare hosts a “Bras for a Cause” event where bras are decorated and modeled by participants. Photographs by Sara Krainik.



## The Samaritan Cancer Program At-a-Glance

The Samaritan Cancer Program provides cancer care for people living in Oregon's Mid-Willamette Valley, from the foothills of the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Our services include medical oncology, radiation oncology, chemotherapy, onsite laboratory, lymphedema services, clinical trials, a cancer resource center, and more. We are members of the Association of Community Cancer Centers and are accredited by the Commission on Cancer, the American College of Radiology, and the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers.

Many of our patients travel from outlying rural areas for treatment. We understand that they could drive a bit further for care in a larger urban area, but they come here because of our reputation for providing high-quality, patient-centered cancer care that recognizes the full spectrum of patient needs—medical, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social. ArtsCare provides a rich palette of arts-related services to address this spectrum of needs. With the addition of professional musicians and artists to our interprofessional care team, our patients and family members are more fully and more compassionately served.

## Professional Artists in the Samaritan Cancer Center

An important component of the ArtsCare model is its engagement of local professional artists and musicians rather than employed art therapists or volunteers. It is not unusual for urban cancer care centers to employ one or two certified art or music therapists who use art as a tool to provide a therapeutic intervention for higher-need patients, but this is not the model we have adopted. We contract with professional artists; each may work anywhere from three to ten hours a week.

Prospective ArtsCare artists are carefully screened for their talent, experience, and temperament. All are professionals who have demonstrated their success as artists and educators through performances, exhibits, and commissioned work. ArtsCare artists are trained about hospital practices and policies and have been educated about the unique needs of cancer patients. They provide ArtsCare services only after they have been cleared to work with cancer patients (e.g., drug tested, current on vaccinations, knowledgeable about infection control, trained about patient confidentiality laws).

The teaching artists are first formally trained about hospital infection control procedures, confidentiality, and other relevant practices and policies. Once approved to work safely and knowledgeably with patients, new artists are mentored by seasoned artists. During this training period, they have an opportunity to observe and practice using ArtsCare's four guiding principles:

1. **Inspire creativity.** Structure ArtsCare activities so that participants are creating art from scratch.
2. **Create a safe environment.** Cultivate a safe space for exploring creativity; honor whatever the participants are experiencing at the moment.
3. **Focus on process.** Model attention on the mindful practice of engaging in art, paying less attention to the appearance of the finished artwork.



(Top) A cancer survivor participates in an art project in conjunction with Samaritan's Annual Cancer Survivor Fair. (Bottom) ArtsCare artist Teiya Inokuma assembles a clay rock totem that Samaritan's radiation oncology staff created in a special art session addressing compassion fatigue. Photographs by Sara Krainik.





(Top) Staff from the surgical department enjoy a break from their busy day to work on a copper tooling project together. (Bottom) A patient at Samaritan's Emehiser Infusion Center works on her copper tile while receiving treatment. Photographs by Sara Krainik.

**4. Make art accessible.** Teach techniques that can be easily replicated at home using supplies that are readily available.

Most ArtsCare artists have said that bringing the arts to people struggling with health issues brings meaning to their own lives and their artistic endeavors. They are dedicated to sustaining our cancer center's arts-enhanced environment and culture and to creating memorable art experiences for all patients, visitors, and staff members. Although arts activities are planned ahead of time, the artists also come equipped with their own bag of tricks for quickly changing from the planned activity to accommodate the needs of an individual patient or group, if necessary. The artist knows not to assume that a patient is ready or able to participate in the arts, even if he or she has been an enthusiastic participant in the past. A surge of nausea or the recent loss of a member from an ongoing arts-based support group may require artists to make a quick decision; that decision is always compassion first and art second. The ArtsCare artist is fully patient centered at each moment.

**ArtsCare is Research Based**

ArtsCare is committed to providing arts-related services that are evidence based and to building the knowledge base on the effectiveness of arts-enhanced health care through research and evaluation of its own programs. Research on ArtsCare has demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between exposure to the arts and patient satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of our staff





members believe that ArtsCare services are beneficial and contribute to a healing environment.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, patients who listened to live music or worked with a visual artist felt that the presence of the arts made a positive difference in their experiences as cancer patients (JKS, unpublished data, 2019).

As a result of its firm grounding in science and research, ArtsCare has received national recognition as a state-of-the-art program in “Arts, Health, and Well-Being in America.”<sup>3</sup> Each year visitors come to Samaritan Health Services to learn about ArtsCare with an eye toward replicating the program in their own communities. When a group of graduate students from the University of Oregon came to Corvallis to learn about ArtsCare, Professor Patricia Lambert described it as “one of the nation’s strongest arts in healthcare programs located in a small town and rural setting.”

Data for ongoing program improvement are continually collected. The ArtsCare coordinator tracks individual patient encounters and registrations for group activities and special events. Feedback from artists is gathered each month as part of their invoicing process. At the end of each Saturday Art Workshop, participants complete an evaluation form to provide feedback on both the instructor and the art activity. This feedback is analyzed each month and suggestions are used to improve the work-



(Top) The finished copper tooling project is mounted on a wall at Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital where all can enjoy it. *Photograph by Sara Krainik.* (Bottom) Cancer survivors enjoy a special interactive drumming session led by ArtsCare musician Dave Chiller. *Photograph courtesy of Karl Maasdam.*





(Top) Saturday ArtsCare workshop participants create colorful mandalas. Photograph courtesy of Karl Maasdam. (Bottom) A cancer patient and her best friend proudly display their finished mandalas. Photograph by Sara Krainik.

shop series. Each year, the coordinator develops an annual report on participation in ArtsCare activities.

Intermittently, an independent professional program evaluator is asked to conduct a formal evaluation of one or more components of ArtsCare. Most recently, Saturday Art Workshop participants were asked to complete an online survey. Findings from this evaluation were used to improve program improvement and to document key outcomes in participants. Workshop participants especially appreciated:

- The quality of the workshops (excellent teachers, curricula, etc.)
- The opportunity for creative expression
- Connecting with others affected by cancer.

### **Program Funding**

Although it has taken several years to build this exciting momentum in our cancer center, ArtsCare has proven to be an essential component of the high-quality cancer care that our patients have come to expect. ArtsCare program administration is now completely supported within the Samaritan operational budget, but additional funding is always needed to pay for the services of the professional artists and musicians themselves. The ArtsCare program coordinator, steering committee, and advisory board are always on the hunt for new funding sources, and grants are





A rock and glass mosaic created by ArtsCare artist Jennifer Smith adorns the entryway at the Samaritan Pastega Regional Cancer Center. *Photograph by Sara Krainik.*

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submitted to many funding sources each year. A few examples of recent fundraising strategies that are used to ensure sustainability include:

- Annual requests are made to hospital foundations.
- ArtsCare was added as an option for employees who make donations through the Employee Caring Campaign.
- Informative ArtsCare “business cards” were created for artists and musicians to distribute to people with whom they have interacted. (Although ArtsCare services are provided free of charge, donations are always welcome.)
- A donation “menu” has been developed to help people determine the right amount to contribute.
- On a larger scale, options for creating a regional ArtsCare fund are being explored, with an eye toward establishing an endowment that would support ArtsCare in perpetuity.
- Multiple grants and applications for funding are submitted each year.

### **The Arts-Enriched Environment**

By contracting with many artists rather than employing a few, we can provide patients, family members, and employees with a varied portfolio of art experiences each week depending upon the particular artists who are present. Given that many cancer patients receive treatments over days, months, and even years, the opportunity for exposure to, or participation in, a fresh array of arts is especially important. ArtsCare opportunities include the following.

#### **Live Music**

On any given day, live music can be heard in our lobbies and treatment areas, with performances including the harp, viola, percussive instruments, Native American flute, guitar, and voice. Though musicians play, they also visit with patients, visitors, and staff, learning about their musical preferences and performing favorite pieces. Having live music performed on a set schedule





Participants enjoy exploring their creativity as part of the Saturday ArtsCare Workshop series offered monthly. *Photograph by Sara Krainik.*

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in the infusion department has had unexpected benefits. We had not anticipated the degree to which live music can provide a positive distraction, enabling patients to take a mental “vacation” from the medical treatment to which they are tethered. Patients and their support companions tell us that time goes by faster when they are listening to live music and report an increased sense of well-being. Artists describe physical transformations they observe in those who engage with the music—calmer breathing, relaxed facial expressions, more smiles. Staff always look forward to the days when musicians are present as much as the patients do.

### **Visual Arts**

Visual artists work one-on-one with patients at bedside or with groups of patients, family members, and staff in the clinic settings. These artists engage those affected by cancer in arts activities specifically designed for their unique needs, using a variety of media, such as clay, drawing, painting, printmaking, and fiber art. The artists understand infection control procedures and physical limitations that go hand-in-hand with various types of

cancer treatments. If a patient is not feeling up to participating in the arts, the presence of the artist and the opportunity to observe art-making by others is usually a welcome diversion.

### **Art Commissions**

When art is commissioned, local artists are invited to submit proposals for artwork that are appropriate for the space and the population being served. Most communities are fortunate to be home to a range of excellent artists, and our community is no exception; one of the written objectives of ArtsCare is to “increase opportunities for local professional musicians and artists to obtain paid work in healthcare settings.” All of the art on display throughout our cancer center was created by local artists. Patients and visitors enjoy seeing local scenes and/or work created by people they know. Funding for the commissioned art comes from local philanthropy, and grateful patients and families will occasionally donate funds to enhance the clinic environment. Healthcare providers have also donated funds to beautify treatment rooms or halls.



### Arts-Based Group Activities

Living with cancer can be an isolating experience, especially for those in the rural communities that the Samaritan Cancer Program serves. Though engagement with the arts is beneficial for everyone, we have found that using the arts as a connector for those affected by cancer in rural communities can be especially potent. In the evenings and weekends, those affected by cancer will eagerly come together to enjoy participatory arts, visit with one another, and learn new arts-related skills. These workshops can be an important salve for those who may feel alone in their disease and recovery. So often we hear comments like:

- “I don’t feel so alone anymore.”
- “I’ve found my tribe.”
- “No one has that look of pity when I enter the room with my bald head.”

### Saturday Art Workshops

Saturday Art Workshops have been held on a regular basis for more than 12 years, providing high-quality, arts-based experiences for participants. Each month a different artist develops an art activity specifically for those affected by cancer. Some months participants may roll up their sleeves and play with clay; in other months, they may paint with watercolors or acrylics or create fiber wall hangings. The artist teaches participants art techniques that can be replicated at home using readily available materials. Participants come together to enjoy participatory arts, learn new arts-related skills, and connect with their peers.

Saturday Art Workshops have proven to be one of our more robust group activities, drawing people from across our tri-county service region. On average, about 40 people attend each month free of charge. Over the past few years the workshop location has had to move to larger spaces three times to accommodate growth in participation. A recent evaluation of these workshops documented positive outcomes in participants and provided valuable evidence of their effectiveness.

### Cancer Support Groups

Mental health professionals who lead support groups for those affected by cancer often request that ArtsCare services be provided during regularly scheduled group sessions. These requests may be motivated by the need to try something new with a group that is not “gelling” or by some challenging emotional turbulence. The artist and the mental health professional work together to determine the most appropriate art modality. Recently, ArtsCare artists and musicians provided one-time or recurring services to the Cancer (including a group for terminal patients), Young Adults, Man-to-Man, and Grief support groups.

### HeartStrings

HeartStrings is offered monthly at the cancer center in the evenings so that those who work during the day can attend. This program was launched by a grant that enabled us to purchase “harpicles” (small, light-weight, learning harps). A HeartStrings session begins with a short harp recital performed by two ArtsCare musicians; each participant is then provided with a harp and instructed how to play notes, chords, and simple songs on a harp themselves.

The purpose of these gatherings is not to provide formal harp instruction but rather to provide an opportunity for participants to create joyful and beautiful sound together. Harps are special in that they sound lovely no matter the skill level—it is impossible to play a bad note. An undercurrent throughout HeartStrings and through most ArtsCare activities is mindfulness: the practice of setting aside everyday concerns while opening up to the creative muse.

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### Special Events

Special arts-based events are opportunities for those affected by cancer to come together, held annually or as one-time events. These events are open to anyone in the community, regardless of where they have received or are receiving cancer treatment. At a recent event, those affected by cancer were invited to take a few moments to reflect on their lives. They were provided with raw arts materials and invited to create rock magnets that illustrated personal affirmations in graphic or written forms.

### Fairs and Community Events

When the Samaritan Cancer Center is invited to participate in a community health fair, such as the annual cancer survivor fair, we come with brochures and art supplies. Some art activities at these community-based events can be completed in just a few minutes by those passing through, whereas others are more extensive. Entire families will often spend time at our activities tables, appreciative of drop-in art sessions that everyone from young children to grandparents can enjoy together.

### Bras for a Cause

As part of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a special “art party” is held at a local art studio for anyone in the surrounding community. During this popular event, bras are decorated and modeled by the participants, educational information is shared, and animated conversation and laughter fills the room while participants enjoy champagne and chocolate.

### Radiation Masks

A cancer patient’s relationship with his or her radiation mask can be very complicated. This event enables those with head and neck cancer to transform their masks in a personally meaningful way. Some individuals with other forms of cancer also attend in a show of solidarity with those with head and neck cancers.



## ArtsCare and Employee Wellness

In addition to its wealth of patient and caregiver activities, ArtsCare has developed programs to support the wellness of the clinicians and staff at Samaritan Cancer Center, including the following.

### Oncology Employee Arts Sessions

Staff members who are satisfied with their work environment provide higher-quality care, have lower turnover, are less likely to experience burnout, and experience better health outcomes. ArtsCare artists are invited to attend regularly scheduled staff meetings and engage employees in a brief warm-up art activity to set the stage for a productive meeting. As needed, managers may request special services for a staff meeting devoted exclusively to art. Measures of success for these events include silence (while people are working intently) and laughter (while artwork is displayed or shared with one another). Some art sessions are designed to enable staff members to create a piece of art for themselves or to give to others as gifts. Other examples include group participatory projects where each member in a department creates a portion of a larger piece for display in the department.

### Employee Photo Show

Tied to our PRIDE (Passion, Respect, Integrity, Dedication, Excellence) initiative, staff members were invited to submit photos they had taken of “something good in their lives.” This theme was a potent message for employees in the oncology department. The photos were professionally mounted and rotated among Samaritan settings in the tri-county region over the course of a year. The show was extremely successful; employees who had never met one another gathered around images for spontaneous conversations. For a few months, the rotating show livened up long hallways that had only empty corridors between two places.


### Employee Copper Tooling Project

The explicit intent of this project was to create a high-quality piece of art for public display in the cancer center. In this participatory art project, staff members were able to drop by an art table during a break to create individual pieces that were assembled as a permanent art installation. Cancer center staff made their own piece of the installation and later came together to see it on display. We have found arts-based projects to be an effective strategy for bringing smiles to the faces of our employees, and they help build a more cohesive team of workers.

### “Remembrance” Ceramic Totem Pole

This activity was developed in response to a concern that radiation oncology staff were experiencing compassion fatigue. After talking with the director about this concern, one of the ArtsCare artists developed a group activity that we called The Remembrance Project. This activity was designed to acknowledge compassion fatigue while enabling staff to come together and enjoy each other’s company. Employees created an art installation called “Remembrance” for the labyrinth and healing garden adjacent to radiation oncology. Each employee created a ceramic “stone” and carved a personal note inside their stone to a patient who had died. The stones were then fired and turned into the art installation for the garden. Together they created a powerful piece of public art that aided in their private experiences of grief.

### Closing Thoughts

The ArtsCare program has been essential in our successful effort to build a uniquely supportive, compassionate, healing environment at the Samaritan Cancer Program. Offering this wide array of ArtsCare services is one of the ways in which we provide excellent medical care while at the same time also attend to the comprehensive needs of our patients—spiritual, social, and emotional. Our ArtsCare program has received regional and national accolades, and we are proud that our patients have come to expect access to arts-based services—these can make all the difference in how they manage and cope with their disease during one of the most difficult times of their lives. 

*Julie Manning, MS, is vice president of marketing, public relations, and community health promotion, and D. Bradley Betz, RTT, is director of oncology services, Samaritan Cancer Program, Corvallis, Ore. Sara Krainik is coordinator of the Samaritan ArtsCare Program, Corvallis, Ore. Jana Kay Slater, PhD, is a consulting research psychologist, Corvallis, Ore.*

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## The Staff and Artist Perspective

*ArtsCare is one of the most appreciated aspects of our patient-centered cancer care because it is so visible—everyone who walks through the doors of our cancer center is provided with multiple opportunities to experience the healing properties of the arts as a therapeutic intervention and social connector. We contract with a cadre of 25 professional artists and musicians who provide richly varied arts experiences for our patients, visitors, and staff.*

—Brad Betz, RTT,  
director of oncology services

*Our infusion center is a happier place when the artists are here. We love walking down the corridor when a new piece of artwork is on display. When the musicians play, we secretly dance behind the desk. Most important, our patients are happier.*

—Nurse

*After I had finished playing, the patient asked me if I had to rush off to see other patients. I told him I could stay with him for longer. He was grateful because, in his words, “Everyone always has to rush off.”*

—ArtsCare musician

*Just wanted to let you know that this was one of the finest things Samaritan has done. I have been with them for 16 years. I have seen more smiles and tears seeing those pictures around the hospital. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*

—Samaritan Employee  
at an Employee Photo Show, 2017

## The Patient Perspective

*I chose the Samaritan Cancer Program because I heard about ArtsCare. I took this to mean that Samaritan cared about the whole person—not just their disease.*

*Your music transformed my experience [during radiation treatments]. It is the one thing that kept me going.*

*I feel like a real person again, and not just my diagnosis.*

*While waiting to see my oncologist, I stare at the painting on the wall and try to place myself in it—anything to take me away from the anxiety I am experiencing at the moment.*

*People just naturally express themselves more easily in an art class setting. You don’t have to talk, and yet something of you comes out, something you create. You’re not thinking of anything else when you’re taking art classes like this. You can just give yourself the space, and time, to be creative.*

*My husband comes to the Saturday Art Workshops with me. He says it’s added another community to his life; that it’s nice to know others who know what you’re going through and care about you. It’s been something really positive for us to do together.*

*I was part of the group harp session that was taught by Lisa, a recording artist with Windham Hill. Within an hour, she had us sounding so good that many of us laughed that we were going to form our own band and take it on the road.*

*The workshops have given me a time to reflect on all the emotions associated with my breast cancer—from fear of dying to acceptance of living with recurrence. Art has been an integral part of my healing process. I have so much gratitude for the workshops!*

*Saturday Art Workshops have strengthened my belief that art heals! When the mind and heart are healed, then the body can heal more fully.*