

# Response art with a dying patient and her family

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## Abstract

This article documents the use of response art by a trainee art therapist in a hospice in Singapore, which was the result of working with a dying patient and her family within a very short timeframe. It uses a personal narrative to present the therapeutic encounter and its aftermath, and shows the evolution of the therapeutic interaction within the context of the client and her family.

## Keywords

Response art, dying patient, hospice care, Singapore, single session.

## Response art with a dying patient and her family

This discussion of the use of response art with a dying patient and her family is based on my experience with a client while I was an art therapy trainee attached to a hospice in Singapore. It examines the process of response art and its relevance to the practice of art therapy. The study is based on Fishman's interpretive model which is "naturalistic, individual-case-based, qualitatively focused, and description-and-discovery-driven" (2005, p.3). I have used my personal narrative to present the therapeutic encounter and its aftermath. Edwards (1999) supports the use of the personal narrative in art therapy case studies, citing Mahoney's comments on Freud as being "patently prepared to erase the line between his role as case writer, clinical pathologist, and author of creative fiction" (1987, p.8). Kapitan also embraces the role of narrative in art therapy research case studies (2010).

In my art therapy work in the hospice, I used a humanistic hermeneutic framework that emphasised the potential for intersubjectivity and interchange between the therapist and the client, and allowed for the evolution of the therapeutic interaction within the interlocking context of the client and their family. In this

case, I not only worked with the rapidly changing physical condition of my client, Clara (pseudonym), but also with her husband's grief and bereavement process.

Material used in the study is based on clinical medical records, process notes of my interaction with the client and her family, and documentation of the process of creating response art. These provide a background to the use of the response art image in the wider context of the client's death and family grieving process.

## Therapeutic interactions with the client

Clara was a 56 year old Chinese woman who had been an English tutor. When she was admitted to the hospice in early 2015 she had terminal advanced metastatic ovarian cancer. First diagnosed six years previously, she had undergone a series of operations, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. In 2014, while on a visit to Australia, Clara had had a pulmonary embolus and insisted on being repatriated to Singapore, where she did not want further treatment. She waited for a month in a private hospital until a bed became available in the hospice, where she was determined to die.

On the morning of her admission I had been briefly introduced to Clara and her husband, Owen (pseudonym). Later that day the social worker referred Clara to me for art