

Rural Veterans Telerehabilitation Initiative Creative Arts Therapy (RVTRI CAT) Project Malcom Randall VA Medical Center

If you have a patient you think would benefit from the RVTRI CAT program, please contact Heather Spooner at heather.spooner@va.gov or Jenny Lee at jlee@arts.ufl.edu or 352-376-1611 x5371

What is CAT?

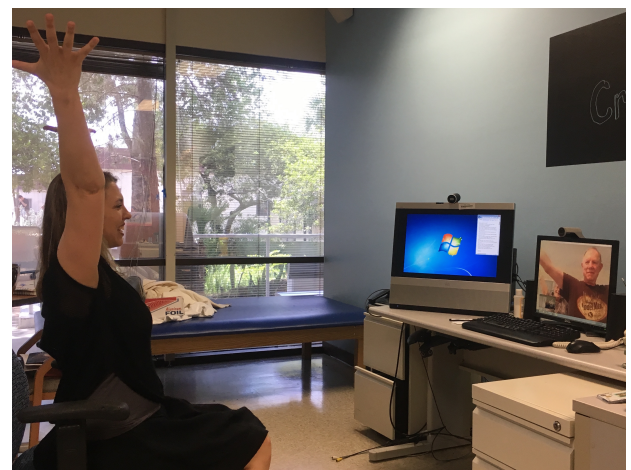
Creative Arts Therapy uses creative processes, like visual art and movement, to optimize health and well-being. Goals may include better communication and increased physical, emotional, cognitive and social functioning. Creative arts therapists have advanced training in both the arts and in counseling. Most disciplines require a master's degree and clinicians are usually eligible for licensure as a mental health counselor in addition to certification by one of the creative arts therapies accrediting bodies. The focus of the RVTRI CAT project is to leverage existing and emerging telehealth technology to bring creative arts therapies to rural and at-risk Veterans



Masks created by a Veteran from her home workshop with guidance from RVTRI CAT art therapist

Why CAT?

Sometimes we get “stuck” and need to look at problems from a new perspective. Creative activities use different parts of our brain than talking. Making a drawing about a problem or making movements that represent a problem can help us view the problem differently than talking about it alone. Sometimes we notice things we missed before. Sometimes we enjoy the creative process so much that it makes it easier to address difficult topics. The arts can also work on more physical goals, such as coordination and motor skills. Many people also discover they really enjoy creative activities and choose to engage in them outside of therapy sessions.



Dance therapist facilitating movement via clinical video telehealth



Veteran sharing her artwork with a therapist via clinical video telehealth

How Does CAT Work via Telehealth?

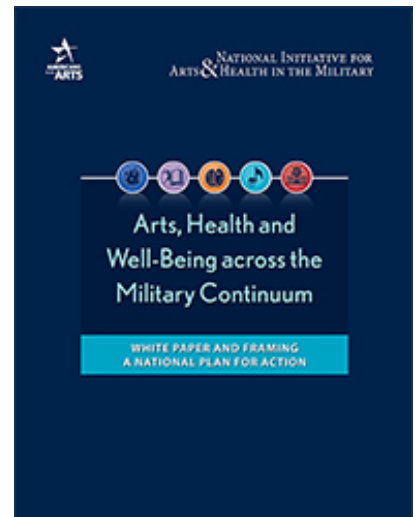
Following an initial evaluation (typically conducted face to face), Veterans are seen weekly for creative arts therapy sessions via clinical video telehealth. Each Veteran receives an art kit with materials such as drawing pencils, colored pencils, markers, oil pastels, water color paints, paint brushes, drawing and painting papers and a journal. Preliminary work by our group has focused on Veterans with TBI, PTSD, health conditions, and substance use disorders in coping with their chronic illness or new diagnoses, stress management, and enhancing emotional wellbeing.

Research

Research shows art therapy can improve cognitive performance (Alders, A. & Levine-Mador, L., 2010), reduce somatic and emotional symptoms (Elkis-Abuhoff, D. L., Goldblatt, R. B., Gaydos, M., & Corrato, S., 2008), and improve Mood (DePetrillo, L., & Winner, E. 2005).

Arts interventions can be a form of Environmental Enrichment (EE) therapy, which has been shown to enhance neuroplasticity, improve recovery function, increase brain resilience to injury and reduce stress and anxiety (National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military, 2012).

When compared to a variety of other interventions with veterans, including journaling, anger management, group therapy, and community service, art therapy was found to decrease negative feeling states, and to do so particularly with veterans experiencing greater PTSD symptoms (Johnson, D.R., Lubin, H. James, M. and Hale & Hale, K. (1997).



References

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- DePetrillo, L. & Winner, #. (2005). Does art therapy improve mood? A test of a key assumption underlying art therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 22(4), 205-212
- Elkis-Abuhoff, D. L., Goldblatt, R. B., Gaydos, M., & Corrato, S. (2008). Effects of clay manipulation on somatic dysfunction and emotional distress in patients with Parkinson's disease. [Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association](#), 25(3), 122-128. (Aging, Elderly, Geriatric/Quantitative) (PSJ)
- Johnson, D.R., Lubin, H., James, M. & Hale, K. (1997). Single session effects of treatment components within a specialized inpatient posttraumatic stress disorder program, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 10(3), 377-390
- National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military (2012). *Arts, health and well-being across the military continuum: white paper and framing a national plan for action*. Washington, D.C.: Americans for the Arts