



Referral Criteria Arts in Primary Care

Some GPs and health workers report that almost any patient may benefit from Arts in Primary Care. Overall patients benefit most who have low self esteem and low self confidence.

Good evidence exists for patients with some conditions:-

- **Mental Health.** There is strong evidence that seeing an artist reduces depression scores, and that self rated wellbeing scores improve significantly. There is also evidence that re-admission rates for psychiatric patients is reduced if they engage with an artist. Post natal depression has been improved significantly by art and group work.
- **Elderly, social isolated** - This group of people benefit greatly from seeing an artist. There are significant benefits proven by studies.
- **Chronic Diseases** - patients with severe illness. Benefits probably by helping concomitant mental health problems.

Other conditions

Many other conditions have benefited from art intervention but as yet do not have a strong evidence base.

- High Consulters- previously called heart sink patients, who often have complicated psychiatric symptoms and medically unexplained problems. These patients tend to reduce their consultation rates with GPs

- Bereavement

- Alcoholism- many projects have reported benefits for these patients although some schemes do not allow referral of this condition. If social isolation is a feature, and also low self esteem, then it is worth a try.

- Substance abuse
- Patients off work on long term certificates
- Chronic disabilities
- Movement disorders- incl Stroke and Parkinson's
- Self Harm without suicidal ideation
- Chronic Pain and Chronic Fatigue

Generally

There is no evidence that referral to an artist does harm.

Clearly if any patient requests referral then it is appropriate.

The main problem for GPs and Health workers is to persuade patients to try it. Sometimes, calling it art therapy is acceptable. Sometimes stressing that it isn't a therapy but a way of improving skills is helpful. It is worth knowing that there is strong evidence behind using art in medicine. The more patients that do it, the more popular it will be. Giving a sense to the patient that you believe it will help is often enough.