

## Arts-based social prescribing for holistic health: Theory and practice integration

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Monday Poster Session, Harborside  
Poster board 07  
February 3, 2025, 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM

### Abstract

#### **Background:**

Social prescribing, where healthcare providers "prescribe" non-clinical activities, improves well-being, reduces anxiety and depression, and enhances primary care utilization. Regular arts and cultural engagement promotes mental health and social connection, reduces chronic disease risk, and mitigates cognitive decline. Arts-based social prescribing supports the holistic treatment of mental health, social isolation, chronic disease, and more.

#### **Objective:**

Art Pharmacy is an arts-based social prescribing service that links patients to monthly arts and cultural engagements with therapeutic benefits. This model is integrated into primary care to address mental health and loneliness among youth, young adults, and older adults. This presentation will focus on Art Pharmacy's evidence-based theory of change and integration of the model to chronic disease, palliative care, and cancer care.

#### **Methods:**

The theory of change is grounded in social prescribing frameworks, behavior change theories, and strategies for addressing social determinants of health. Art Pharmacy matches patients to community-based arts and cultural engagements and helps address barriers by covering costs, arranging transportation, and providing companion access. Scientific evidence is incorporated into Art Pharmacy's personalized engagements to optimize health. Clinically validated tools are used to track member's mental health (PHQ, GAD), loneliness (UCLA-3), and well-being (WHO-5 Well-Being Index).

#### **Results:**

Art Pharmacy members report increases in mental health scores, reductions in clinical anxiety and depression symptoms and less loneliness after participating in services. This impact extends beyond mental health and primary care patients. Art Pharmacy is partnering with Emory University to connect palliative care and cancer patients (and their families) with arts and cultural activities to support holistic health. We are integrating Art Pharmacy's model into chronic disease management and cancer care to understand how this multilevel approach influences these complex health problems.

#### **Conclusion:**

Art Pharmacy's theory of change and care delivery model effectively integrates social and medical care. Evaluation research about how arts-based social prescribing impacts hypertension and cancer outcomes will help fill critical gaps in understanding integration of social care into complex disease treatment and management.