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Cancer Patients Thrive Through Art

Program Allows Patients To Paint, Make Art

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CENTRAL FLORIDA -- What if the stroke of a paint brush could cure cancer? Some people say it really can help. It's being used in Central Florida as a unique therapy treatment at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Orlando.

Dimitri Kopansky is almost done with chemotherapy, he's nearly completed his battle against testicular cancer. A chance to paint during his last week in therapy is a surprising bright spot.

"I usually bring my laptop, iPod and a book. But after doing this five days, it gets boring. It's nice to have a different thing to do," Kopansky said.

MD Anderson Cancer Center Orlando in partnership with United Arts of Central Florida just started the Creative Center's Artists in Residence program a few months ago.

"When you're going through cancer treatment, you can really get closed in. It's nice to see people blossom," Andrea Canny, one of the artists, said.

Canny is one of three artists helping patients on the road to recovery through the art program.

"I start a project and have them finish. They can get as complicated as they want with watercolors or paper weaving," she said.

Mind Body Medicine Program manager Jeanne Miller-Clark said, based on the feedback, the artwork is working. She said nurses have mentioned how it calms patients down. Some have even discovered new hobbies through the activities.

"I don't know of anything more healing in the midst of cancer than to create something beautiful, that feeds you, continues to nourish you, changes even the quality of your life," Miller-Clark said.

"Doing something you enjoy doing that will get your mind off everything. It's that will to fight, will to live aspect," Kopansky said.

MD Anderson Orlando is one of only 20 facilities selected for a LIVESTRONG grant, which funds the art program. That grant runs out next year, and the center is currently looking for sponsors to help keep it going.

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