

TAMC patients express themselves through art

By Mr. William F. Sallette (Regional Health Command-Pacific) April 22, 2016



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A patient writes up a synopsis of her painting at the 10th annual Oncology on Canvas event April 22, at Tripler Army Medical Center. Participants were asked to write a synopsis on their painting to explain what they may have been feeling or what their painting represented. More than 300 patients, staff members and volunteers participated in the event. *(Photo Credit: Mr. William F Sallette (Regional Health CommandPacific))*

VIEW ORIGINAL

HONOLULU-The 10th annual Oncology on Canvas event was held at Tripler Army Medical Center (TAMC) April 22-23, and more than 300 patients, survivors, volunteers and family members showed up for the event.

The annual event gives patients, survivors and their family members the opportunity to use art to express their personal cancer journey and reflect on their own experiences.

More than 450 paintings were created during the event, and the artwork is now being presented at the Honolulu Hale through May 22, and then will be displayed at TAMC in the 10th floor conference room until July 2.

"Cancer affects more than just the person diagnosed. It affects everyone around that person," said Dr. Patricia Nishimoto, Oncology clinical nurse specialist at TAMC. "This is a time where there are no needles and no chemotherapy, but a time where we get to sit with patients and hear their dreams, their life stories and allow us to be truly present with them."

The program began in 2007 after two nurses from Hawaii attended the National Oncology Nursing Society Conference and got to see art created by cancer survivors. Each art piece had a short story next to it, about how the artwork reflected their personal cancer journey, and the nurses knew they had to bring this opportunity to Hawaii.

"The first year at Tripler, we had 33 participants, and last year, we had over 330 participants," Nishimoto said. "The ability of art-making to convey both figurative content and feelings opens up communication between partners and their children, between individuals and the larger community."

Although the event was initiated by oncology nurses, it has grown to be truly interdisciplinary with staff from almost every section of the hospital volunteering to help, including social work, psychology, child life, pharmacy, physicians and students from all disciplines.

"Each year, I am amazed at the impact it has on participants and even the volunteers who attend," Nishimoto said. "Many times, the nursing student volunteers who participate in the event, decide that they want to specialize in oncology nursing."

Although the event is about painting and expressing one's self in an art form, many family members noted something else that was present at the event.

"They care a lot, and they care about every aspect of you, not just your cancer," said Mary Ormond, TAMC Oncology patient. "This team has made me realize that this is not the end of the world, but just the start of a whole new chapter of my life. It's time to start living for now and not for tomorrow."