

1-21-2015

# The Role of Art in the Patient Experience: An Evaluation of Art from the Heart at UVM Medical Center

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## Recommended Citation

Chieffe, Doug; Coffin, Steven; King, Sarah; Shehab, Syed; Suppan, Catherine; Warren, Gwen; Wieland, Rebecca; Schwarz, Rebecca; and Pasanen, Mark, "The Role of Art in the Patient Experience: An Evaluation of Art from the Heart at UVM Medical Center" (2015). *Public Health Projects, 2008-present*. 205.  
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### Introduction

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of total physical, mental and social well-being, not just the absence of disease or fragility. Making art in medical settings reduces pain, tiredness, emotional distress and other feelings that negatively affect well-being, while enhancing positive emotions and communication. (1) According to the 2009 "State of the Field Report" by the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, 43-45% of healthcare institutions reported having some form of an art program. (2)

*Art from the Heart (AFTH)* is a program of Burlington City Arts in collaboration with the University of Vermont Medical Center. With the aid of volunteers, *AFTH* offers pediatric patients and their families the opportunity for a more normalized experience by providing them with time and materials to experience the joys of creativity and imagination. Waiting areas, in-patient hospital rooms, exam rooms and chemotherapy infusion bays become temporary art studios. (3)



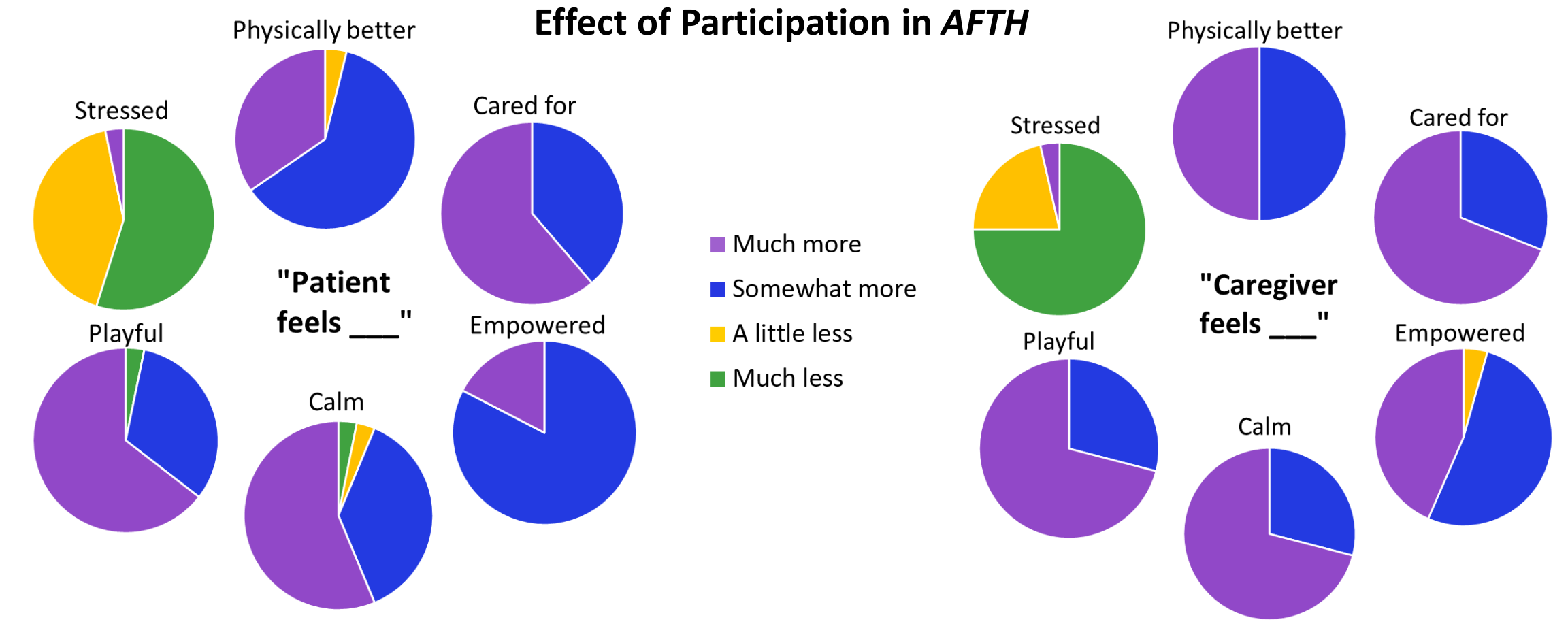
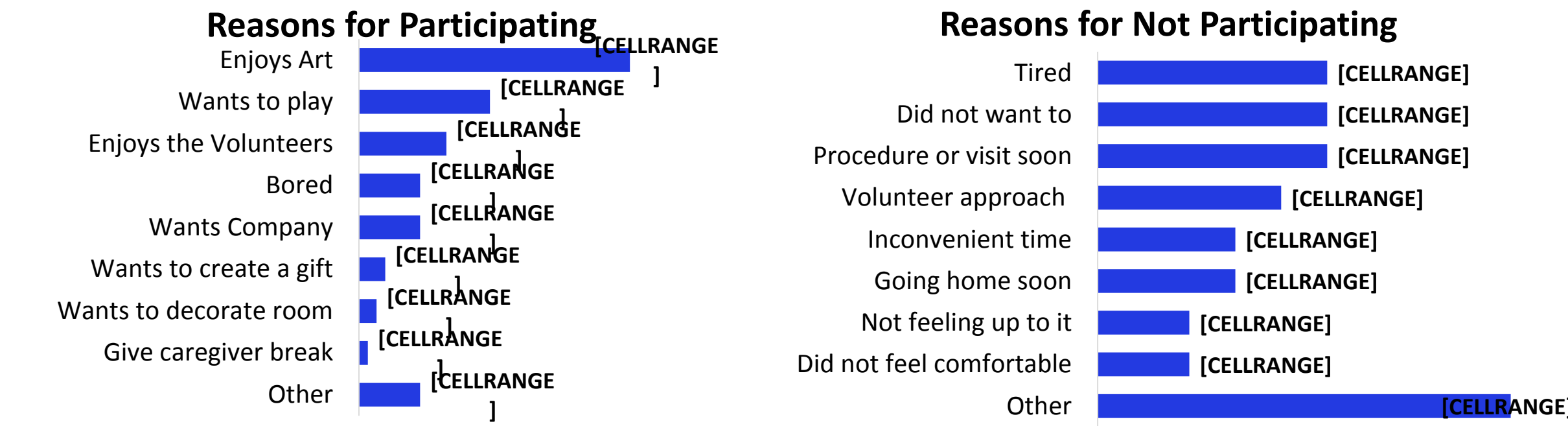
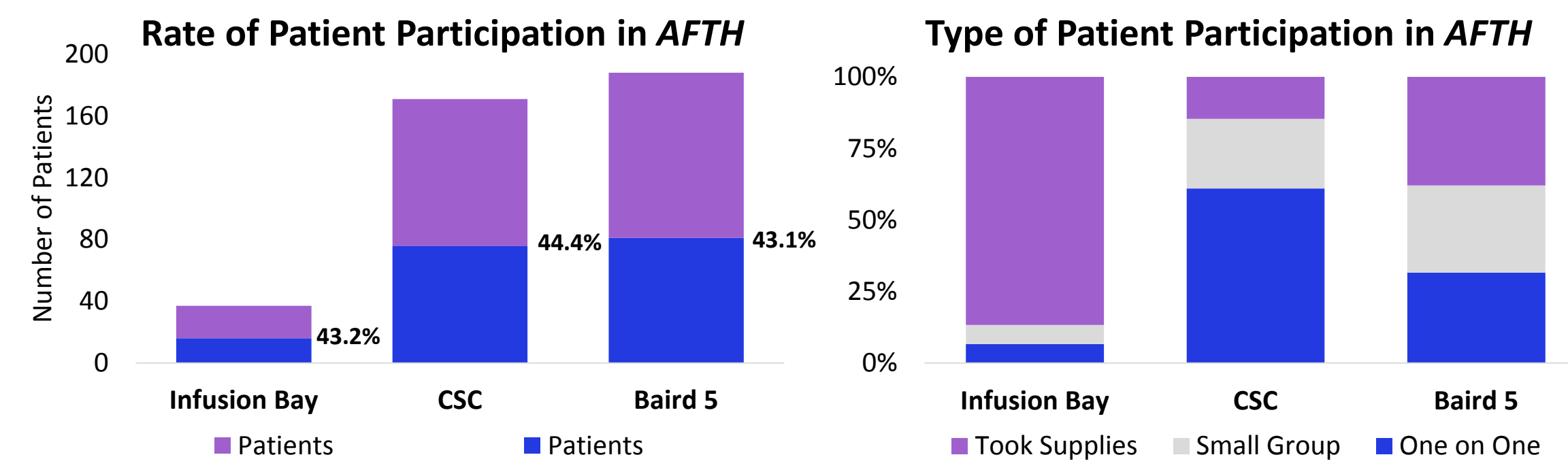
The purpose of our public health project was to evaluate the presence and impact of *AFTH* in three pediatric points of care at UVM Medical Center.

### Methods

- Study locations included the infusion bay, the outpatient children's specialty center (CSC), and the inpatient pediatric floor (Baird 5).
- During October and November 2014, volunteers distributed surveys to adults accompanying *AFTH* participants:
  - A 5-question "Yes Please" form assessed why patients chose to participate in *AFTH* and the outcomes of participation.
  - A 3-question "No Thanks" form assessed why patients chose not to participate.
  - Survey collection boxes were located in the hospital to ensure anonymity.
- A volunteer form completed during each *AFTH* shift tracked volunteer-participant interactions at each location.

### Results

During 36 volunteer shifts, 40 "Yes Please," 23 "No Thanks," and 36 "Volunteer" forms were collected. 1-4 volunteers were present during each shift for a total of 234 volunteer hours. 396 patients and 257 family members were asked to participate in *AFTH*, 43.7% and 24.5% of which participated respectively. When asked what would make participation more likely in the future, the most common responses were "at a different time" (50%), "just not interested in art" (22.2%), "different supplies" (22.2%), and "different volunteer approach" (5.6%).



### Discussion

- Conclusions**
- The high level of participation illustrates the established favorability of *AFTH*, and the need to continue its funding for prospective patients.
  - Participation rates were similar throughout the three areas of pediatric care. This demonstrates the vast array of pediatric care settings in which *AFTH* provides benefit.
  - The most popular art activity differed in each of the three areas, highlighting the need for a diverse collection of art supplies.
  - Inopportune timing was the most common reason for the patient to decline to participate in *AFTH*.
  - Greater than 90% of caregivers across all study locations reported improvements in all measured aspects of their patient's psychological well-being. Similar results were reported in family members'/guardians' psychological well-being.



These findings demonstrate that *AFTH* has a beneficial impact on patients and their families during their time at UVM Medical Center.

**Limitations**

Due to research protection requirements, survey distribution was limited to parents/guardians and participants over the age of 18. This may have resulted in misrepresentation of effects on patient well-being and reasons for participation or refusal. Additionally, the majority of surveys collected were from the CSC, where short waiting times may have led to a higher rate of patient refusal.

**Future Directions**

- We suggest implementing additional *AFTH* shifts in order to increase patient accessibility and maximize participation.

### References

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### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the patients, caregivers and *AFTH* volunteers who made this project possible. A special thank you to Rebecca Schwarz for her help and input every step of the way.