

CHI Memorial Hospital

UTILIZING THE POWER OF MUSIC, DRAMA, AND ART THERAPIES FOR EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

An informational interview with Chyela Rowe
MA, RDT, CHI Memorial Hospital,
Chattanooga, TN

Interviewed by Chris Clarke and Madison Tandy



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Tennessee Hospital Association is gathering best practices and researching innovative methods hospitals are using to take care of their employees, to share among Tennessee facilities and showcase Tennessee hospitals' outstanding work. The Tennessee Center for Patient Safety at THA interviewed Chyela Rowe, MA, RDT, Coordinator – Arts Therapies & Well-Being Program at CHI Memorial Chattanooga to learn how she utilizes art, drama, and music in CHI Memorial's staff well-being programs.



Redhead by Nathan Stepney / BLM by Dr. Valerie Smith

Chyela Rowe, MA, RDT (Registered Drama Therapist) has a background in mental health counseling, intermodal arts, and drama therapy. Chyela focuses on music, art, and drama therapies as part of CHI Memorial Hospital's worker well-being and assistance programs, in addition to partnering with staff on issues like manager-employee relationships.

Chyela began her role at CHI Memorial in 2019, immediately preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. Employee burn-out was critical prior to the pandemic, and the pandemic was heartbreaking as employees had to muster up even more resilience to address the chaos impacting hospitals. Not only did hospital employees have to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic itself, but racial disparities, hate crimes, pay inequity, and other harmful social issues were compounded at the same time. In such a trying time, Chyela knew the only hope she had in helping hospital staff would have to be something creative.

Music

In 2021, Chyela recruited a music therapy graduate student who visited units to help ease frustration, cynicism, and stress

among staff as part of a music therapy clinical internship. She knew that staff may not always have time to take full advantage of the employee “recharge suite”, which contains a piano, comfy seating, an art room, and more. In response, she brought music to the nurses!

Chyela utilizes her education and research and implements creative methods such as this to help employees activate the parasympathetic nervous system, so they can return to patients and coworkers feeling more calm and focused.

Art

In 2020, Chyela continued to develop the Arts in Health program at CHI Memorial by bringing artists and licensed art therapists together to deliver the healing power of art to individuals and communities in need.

Learn more about CHI Memorial’s art therapy work by watching the following [Arts and Healing | CommonSpirit](#) video.

The visual art exhibits at the hospital feature curated original art from local artists that connect to the experiences of those who are at work, visiting, or receiving care at CHI Memorial.

For instance, CHI Memorial partnered with local artist Rondell Crier to animate a rooftop garden with a labyrinth mural on concrete paving stones. The final design was the result of a healing art process that included patients, staff, and community members.



Other examples of arts in health at CHI Memorial include a partnership with the Association for Visual Arts (AVArts.org) to host an open call exhibit titled, “How Are We Doing: A Pandemic Retrospective” where the exhibit featured artwork made in response to the pandemic. The river mural project, created by artist Tim Goldsmith, engaged hospital staff to write prayers, thoughts, and things they needed to let go of.



River Mural Project - Artist Tim Goldsmith

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Local artists reach out to Chyela to exhibit at the hospital. She also works with students, who occasionally join CHI Memorial as interns to get experience curating arts in health exhibits. Chyela believes that there is room for the program to expand. Her goals include working with community artists and creative arts therapists to expand community outreach, creating an application for artists to submit to exhibit, and developing additional resources for promoting the program.

Chyela’s Plans

Chyela’s plans underway include:

1. Launch a music therapy program and source a guitar or keyboard for every unit
2. Continue to build the Visual Art Exhibit program
3. Hold drama therapy workshops with nurse leaders starting Fall 2022 to research and build peer support programs

Encouragement for Other Hospitals

Chyela's advice for other hospitals looking to strengthen their worker well-being programs is to recruit a music therapist and hire someone to do art exhibits by partnering with their arts community. Chyela pursues grants and private donations to fund additional staff such as music therapists and applied arts facilitators who can increase community health impact.

Some hospitals may not have immediate resources to implement these strategies; however, there are always creative ways to include art, music, and performance arts in the well-being journey for employees and in strengthening relationships among coworkers.

If you are interested in Chyela's research and well-being strategy work, contact her at chyela.rowe@commonspirit.org.



Chyela Rowe

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