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## Arts and Health

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## Arts and Health

Historically, the relationship between arts and health has been well documented but probably only recently has it been accepted as 'mainstream'. We have to thank high profile media personalities such as Gareth Malone, the choir master, for showing us the benefit of singing, while the Cultural Olympiad has gone some way to bring the best of arts and culture across dance, music, theatre, the visual arts, film and digital innovation to a wider audience. 'Sing for Your Life' is a choir that has been set up by the cancer charity Tenovus, where doctors are researching whether the positive mental attitude that singing can give will help patients in their fight against cancer. The incredible journey taken by this unique choir documented on the BBC has, I'm sure, touched us all and made evident the potential for this type of initiative within a healthcare framework. Music is also the focus of a paper by Creech *et al.*,<sup>1</sup> where data from three case studies of musical community involvement are presented, comprising a wide range of group activities that include steel pans, guitars, ukulele, recorder, keyboards, samba, singing, and song writing. Results demonstrate an enhanced subjective wellbeing amongst participants which was translated to having a positive outlook on life, greater autonomy and control, more positive social relationships, competence, and a sense of recognised accomplishment.

The term 'arts' can include a wide range of activities and is presented in this issue as a means of inspiring positive health change both for the individual and communities. Professor Stephen Clift is one of the leading academics in this field and we thank him for coordinating the papers in this special issue.

Using strategies that promote greater overall health are for the long term and really underpin the move from treating illness to the state of holistic wellbeing. Conducting a systematic review on the effects of participating in creative activities on the health and wellbeing of children aged between 11-18 years, Bungay<sup>2</sup> found a positive effect on behavioural change, self-confidence, self-esteem, levels of knowledge, and physical activity (the Hip Hop dance programme is mentioned). Findings from participants involved in the 'Invest to Save' arts project for older people and adults with mental health, diagnoses suggest that the programme provided a sense of purposeful occupation, cognitive, and creative challenge and opportunities for autonomous self-expression and heightened concentration.<sup>3</sup> It is true that arts projects have a broad appeal and can be highly inclusive, moreover they can accommodate participants with diverse needs and allow for innate creative potential to be realised. Nevertheless, a core issue is always the strength of the health evaluation; sometimes it is a challenge to measure the value and impact. The paper by Cameron *et al.*,<sup>4</sup> is therefore welcomed for its pragmatic stance where the authors raise the point of short term project funding that runs out. They quite rightly observe that there is a need to draw on evidence to develop principles and recommendations for bodies wishing to commission and artists wishing to lead participatory or public art initiatives that are most likely to result in sustained benefit to individuals and communities.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows the arts can, and do, make a major contribution to key health and wider community issues. Confidence is now required to translate this into practice.

**Dr Heather Hartwell**  
Honorary Editor

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The November 2012 CPD paper was: 'Mobile telecommunications and health: Report of an investigation into an alleged cancer cluster in Sandwell, West Midlands'

Answers 1b, 2c, 3b, 4b

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The March 2013 issue will be the next CPD issue of the journal