

# The Television as a Touch-Point of Healing



## "CONTENT IS KING"

The phrase was coined by media giant Sumner Redstone in reference to the broadcasting of entertainment television. Bill Gates used the term widely when referring to the internet.

In this paper we will look at why content is king in a healthcare setting, and how it can be leveraged to improve the patient experience, and prime the patient for healing to occur.

# INTRODUCTION

## WAIT, WAIT, WAIT...

There are several different environments and pockets of time to be discussed. The hospital inpatient room, the hospital family waiting room, the private practice waiting room, outpatient waiting room, and the exam room are all environmental issues.

The downtime between rounding doctors and nursing staff, the “waiting room bubble,” and the “exam room limbo” are pockets of time when care can be given *without* a human having to be there.

Healthcare designers and patient experience professionals may be missing a prime opportunity when it comes to engaging and inspiring a patient to participate in their own healthcare. There is a window of time that can be leveraged for this opportunity and we can even argue that this time is being spent *creating* stress and *contributing* to the down cycle of the patient’s healing. There is much data on how negative media contributes to increased cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate, and how positive or relaxing media like nature videos and guided imagery reduce these physiological responses.

With some astonishing statistics and research from several sources, we find that there is much time available and a perfect delivery system already in place for this engagement to occur. In this paper we will look at how television media content is influential on a patient’s physiology and emotional response to healing. With a conscious effort on the part of all those involved in the patient experience, we can design inspiration, engagement, and transformation.

We will look at the current use of televisions and media and see how some facilities incorporate designed content and how others neglect to realize the impact of the negative content that is being broadcast. Personal stories along with hard data will also be included, and then we will submit solutions on how one can design a powerful system to be in alignment with the vision of the facility and its guiding principles.

# OUR CURRENT SITUATION

Over the last 5 to 10 years the concern for improved patient experience has become top of mind for healthcare facilities and experience creators along with caregivers. While they have approached many areas like environmental design, caregiver empathy, holistic modalities, and clearer communication with patients, they have not fully addressed the issue of the content that is being provided to patients via the vast amount of television screens that are accessible to the patients. (see."REF. 1 - "Opportunity Costs of Ambulatory Medical Care in the United States")

We have also seen an uptick in patients wanting to be more engaged in their healing process by seeking out alternative methods, nutritional and exercise information, managing their healthcare records and keeping digital diaries of their health journey. We have learned that the more engaged and empowered a patient or family caregiver is in the process of healing, the higher the rate of improvement for the patient overall.

It is very common for a patient's blood pressure reading to be much higher at the time of examination and for them not to be able to absorb important health information during the time of the exam. This possibly leads to non-compliance issues.

In my experience, it is rare to walk into a hospital waiting area or a private practice office where there is not a flat screen television mounted on the wall. Most often in the hospital waiting room or cafeteria setting, these screens are either broadcasting a 24 hour news station or some form of daytime entertainment television. In smaller environments and specialized areas, you will find educational content that is focused on the specialty of the practice or general overall health tips. While this is informative, it is not necessarily engaging.

## THE NEWS MEDIA

When the 24 hour crisis news broadcast is inescapable, the patients, family members, and caregivers are being exposed to content that works against their healing. This constant barrage of fear and hopelessness is creating learned helplessness in individuals and the negative emotional tone of the content stimulates the amygdala to trigger the flight or fight response. Hence the physiological changes in blood pressure, heart rate, etc. While researchers argue over whether or not viewing television news reporting on the terror attacks on 9/11 actually caused PTSD, can we doubt that this type of media caused real time stress? (see "REF. 6 - "What Constant Exposure To Negative News Is Doing To Our Mental Health" "REF. 2 - "Is Television Traumatic?")

## WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Currently, designers, patient experience officers, and caregivers provide television screens with either entertainment or education in mind. Screens are either tuned into broadcast news, daytime entertainment television, or programmed to display medical educational media and in some instances nature relaxation videos. Very often, a patient or family member is captive to whatever a staff member chooses to tune into and, at times, the attending staff person does not even have control of what is being played on the screen.

Even if a family member or patient wants the station to be changed on a public space television, they have difficulty getting to the right person to change it. Sometimes they cannot even lower the volume which can be very frustrating especially if there is negative news media being projected.

# PERSONAL STORY

This happened on a few occasions while I was supporting my sister through her journey of healing from a rare brain tumor in 2014. We were the only ones sitting in the waiting room area for radiology and imaging at a hospital in California and the television was tuned to a 24 hour news station. My sister was preparing for an MRI to see if there was any growth on the small portion of tumor that was left in her skull. This tiny particle remained attached to her brain stem because it was too dangerous to remove it during her 13 hour surgery six months prior. She was very nervous about what the imaging might show and was trying to keep herself calm prior to the MRI.

Because the television was broadcasting the news, she was getting more stressed out than necessary and found it difficult to concentrate on positive thoughts. We asked the attendant at the desk to either change the channel or lower the television volume. The attendant was unable to accommodate our request because she did not have a remote and the television monitor was tied into a closed circuit system. She would need a building engineer to make the change. By the time the engineer came to the area, heard the request and was able to get back to the proper room to make the change, we were called in for the MRI. This took about 20 minutes. These 20 minutes should have been used to help my sister, the patient, relax and calm her mind instead of contributing to her stress.

Designing where the television goes is only part of the design process. There needs to be an objective other than distraction when turning on a television. This should be included in the overall design of the patient experience. The content programming is what needs to be designed. And, empowering hospital employees to make conscious decisions when choosing media to broadcast is also part of the process.

## FAMILY & FRIENDS MATTER

In the hospital setting, it is not only the patients that the patient experience team is concerned with but also the family members. What kind of experience is being provided to them?

The family lounges are filled with televisions and are rarely programmed for positive, inspiring, or informative media.

This is such a prime opportunity to get family members engaged, relaxed and preparing them to encounter their loved one with the necessary mindset to be a positive force of healing.

# INPATIENT ROOM TELEVISIONS



## HOLISTIC-APPROACHED HEALTHCARE

When a hospital is able to offer a holistic approach to healing there is evidence of improved patient experience and reduced pain and anxiety. (See "REF. 7 - "Effective Factors in Providing Holistic Care: A Qualitative Study") Holistic defined is: mind, body, and spirit. There are several facilities offering this approach and yet there are still not enough trained holistic nurses that are available to provide the services that patients are requesting. Also, there are many quadrants of time when a nurse is unavailable to help a patient create a relaxation response.

The television can become an additional tool in the holistic caregivers toolbox. While the holistic approach uses hands on treatment such as Reiki, aromatherapy, touch therapy, and spiritual care to create relaxation responses, they can also use something that will help to fill the gap in time between treatments. Nature relaxation videos that are accessible to patients on the inpatient room televisions are a tool that can call up the relaxation response when a caregiver is not available. This is currently being used in the holistic health care program at the Cleveland Clinic and many other hospitals have 24 hour nature relaxation programs in order to reduce stress and create a sense of calm.

# PRIVATE PRACTICE

## PATIENT-CENTERED CARE MODELS

When conscious content is chosen to be served up to patients, the caregiving facility is sending the message that they are a patient-centered facility. They know that they are not just treating the disease, the injury, or ailment. There is a person attached to that body and that person is the patient. They are the center of focus. They are experiencing the whole situation. Feeding the person's mind with positive media, inspiring media, and engaging media is part of the care model.

While waiting to see the neurology team, at St. John's Brain Tumor Center & Pituitary Disorders Program, for pre-op meetings on my sister's rare brain tumor after a six hour drive from Las Vegas to Santa Monica CA, we were comforted by a lovely waiting area that had fresh cucumber water, large spacious seating, and a television screen that broadcasted the C.A.R.E. channel which specializes in nature relaxation. This was a great way for us to feel as though the caregiving team put some effort into thinking about what we might be feeling while waiting to see the neurosurgeon. My sister made several comments how she really felt that she was in a healing center that was going to get her through this. Not once did she feel like she was just another body that was going to be operated on.

According to a 2015 article in The American Journal of Managed Care, the average time spent during an office visit to a medical professional is nearly **87** minutes in which **21** minutes is actually being spent with the caregiver.

What is happening in the other **66** minutes?

### WHY NOT USE THIS TIME FOR PRIMING?

When patients arrive to a facility, they are typically in a state of anxiety, fear, pain or frustration and often are unable to cognitively receive information that is being delivered to them by the caregiver.

In the article Heart-Brain Neurodynamics by Rollin McRaty, Ph.D, he describes how neuroscience has proven that emotional processing happens at a much higher rate than cognitive processing which affects a person's ability to cognitively absorb information. When we are in a relaxed state of mind we are able to communicate more effectively. Listening becomes more active and emotional response is less reactive.

By creating a relaxing and comforting atmosphere for the patient during the wait time and leveraging the opportunity to create a relaxation response, perhaps the patient will be able to receive medical information and instruction more effectively.

# SOLUTIONS

A well thought-out and planned network of content that is consciously chosen can and does make a difference in the family and patient experience. Types of content should include and do the following:



## Engage

### ENGAGINGCONTENT

Includes guided meditation or guided imagery. The viewer engages cognitively to bring themselves into a state of relaxation.

## Transport

### TRANSPORTINGCONTENT

Content that brings the viewer to beautiful places in nature that would trigger relaxation responses that are inherent in nature.

## Educate

### EDUCATIONALCONTENT

Information that is useful for the viewer to understand her condition and learn about her health in order to be more proactive.

# SOLUTIONS



## Enlighten

### ENLIGHTENINGCONTENT

Exposing patients to content that introduces them to thought leaders in the fields of personal performance and development will enlighten them to new ways of thinking that will help them to reduce the fight or flight response.

## Inspire

### INSPIRINGCONTENT

Hearing from others who have been on the journey of healing that are willing to share their stories in order to let others know they are not alone and encourage them to use techniques to trigger relaxation responses.

# BENEFITS

We see the benefits of mindfully choosing content are many. The first would be to create the relaxation response in individuals which we now know triggers the physiological changes of lower blood pressure, reduced heartbeats, slowed breathing and lower cortisol levels. Because of this positive physiological response, pain is reduced and the brain is also able to respond to and engage in a cooperative way.(see “REF. 8 - “Heart-Brain Neurodynamics.”)

When the patients pain levels are reduced, the body’s ability to heal is enhanced and when that occurs, hospital stays are shortened and patient experience levels rise. Patients are encouraged to participate in their health and healing if they experience a positive outcome to using certain modalities.

When the patient is open to the holistic approach, they will want to participate and they will want to learn about new ways of being. They want to fill their toolbox so they can have some control. Lack of control is a big issue for patients and for family members as well. The scheduled pain meds and visits from the caregivers are not in a patient’s control. Giving them a choice of media content that will create positive outcomes gives them a sense of control. When they can choose which media to watch and when to watch it, they gain that control.

# SOLUTIONS FOR HOSPITAL WAITING ROOMS

The family members are a huge part of the patient population in the hospital and they need attention and care as well. Waiting for a loved one during surgery is one of the hardest times and the environment that one has to be in certainly contributes to the stress level. When offered up good, well thought-out content the family member will feel as though they are also being cared for. Neglect can be a feeling when sitting in the “limbo lounge.” Give the family member the opportunity to use the time to be calm, be inspired and prep for the outcome of the procedure.

Often the family member will not want to leave the surgical waiting lounge area so this is a great opportunity to provide them with positive energy. Rick Hanson Ph. D., and neuropsychologist, suggests that the mind will naturally go toward what could be a negativity bias. This is the brain’s way of protecting us. By searching for things that could go wrong it prepares us in case a quick response is necessary. We do not live in the threat of tigers jumping out at us, but our ancient brains do not know that. So any threat like the loss of a loved one, is treated as such. By engaging the family member in positive media choices, we can create an atmosphere of safety which will allow them to be less stressed, less fearful, and then in turn be able to participate in the loved ones healing process.



# CONGRUENCY

## AS A HEALTH CARE PARTNER ARE YOU WALKING YOUR TALK?

**W**hen a healthcare organization is branded as an innovative and integrative healing model, it projects that in everything it does. From the moment a patient steps through the doors this is felt. There needs to be congruence at every touchpoint in the hospital. Main public spaces may create this feeling with open architecture and art work and by consciously choosing what is being projected on the television screens.

If these 3 areas are in alignment with the choice of content, the branding is then consistent. If there is incongruence in television content between departments, waiting areas and food courts, the patient and family member will notice this and feel as though there is neglect on the part of the organization to deliver on their message of caring.

By making that very conscious choice on what to project on the screens in these spaces, the branding of the organization is congruent. The person feels as though there is a depth to the caring that was promised to them. They will feel safer and more secure in their choice of coming to the hospital they have chosen. They will feel more confident that the practice is a solutions-based practice and an empowering place of healing. This is a true holistic model. Every area is thought out and considered to be important in the outcome and the patient experience.

# FILLING THE GAP: HOLISTIC NURSING & TELEVISION

**B**arb Picciano RN, BSN, HN-BC is the manager of the Healing Services Team at the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic. The team includes caregivers from the office of Patient Experience and Spiritual Care along with holistic caregivers throughout the organization. They are now directing patients and family members to use nature relaxation videos that are being streamed as part of their pain management program. Barb states that this tool allows the patient to have a relaxation response at anytime and helps the team to provide the holistic care that is promised to the patient even when a caregiver is not physically able to be there.

Relaxation videos are a simple solution for those times when a patient needs a relaxation response and is unable to cognitively recall some other exercises like Tapping that they may have had in a session with a holistic caregiver. The patient or a family member can dial up an on-demand video from the on-demand catalogue and immediately be transported to a place in nature and hear therapeutic music that is designed specifically to create such a response.

# CONCLUSION

Hospital stays, long waiting room times and the environment patients are exposed to when they are facing health issues can produce quite a bit of stress, which in turn creates high cortisol levels and sets off the physiological cycle that makes it difficult for the patient to heal faster and cognitively understand what is happening to them.

Depending on the types of content that is broadcast over a healthcare television network, we've seen that the screen can be used to either increase stress or induce a relaxation response. The messaging to a patient, family member or caregiver is that the facility is empathetic to the downtimes during visits to offices, recovery time during the hospital stay and the anxiety, pain and stress that is felt while caring for loved ones. From a holistic approach, the content that we have looked at in this paper is a perfect tool to supplement the mind, body, spirit connection and add to the modalities of healing. This is why the statement "Content is King" is the guiding principal when thinking of the television as a touch-point of healing.

A full spectrum of content which includes engaging, transporting, educational, enlightening and inspiring stories is what needs to be included in the television programming of a facility that embraces the approach of caring for the whole patient, their family members and caregivers.

Patient Experience officer's and healthcare designers have a great opportunity to improve the patient experience, influence healing and engage patients in their healing with the proper television programming.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Healing Heart™ TV was created in 2014 by award-winning cinematographer, Gina DeGirolamo, after her experience with being her sister's caregiver through a very difficult illness and surgery. After weeks spent in the hospital, Gina began to observe what was working and what wasn't for the patient, the families and the caregivers.

What wasn't working? Hospital noise, constant interruption, an overwhelmed nursing staff, and negative news media being played on hospital televisions. What was working? Facilities that streamed nature videos, healing music and guided imagery on their televisions; healing gardens and beautiful art work, and holistic approaches to patient care like Reiki and yoga as part of the healing services.

Gina decided she needed to make a contribution and make it her mission to transform the patient experience through the creation of cinematic nature videos. Once she began on this road she realized that there were so many other forms of media content that could support not only the patient experience but the caregiver experience as well.

\*As of May 2020 Healing Heart™ tv is a non-profit organization that donates inspirational video content and mindful media to patients, families and front line workers.

Please visit our website [healinghearttv.org](http://healinghearttv.org) for more information. You can also reach Gina DeGirolamo directly at: [gina@healinghearttv.org](mailto:gina@healinghearttv.org)



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