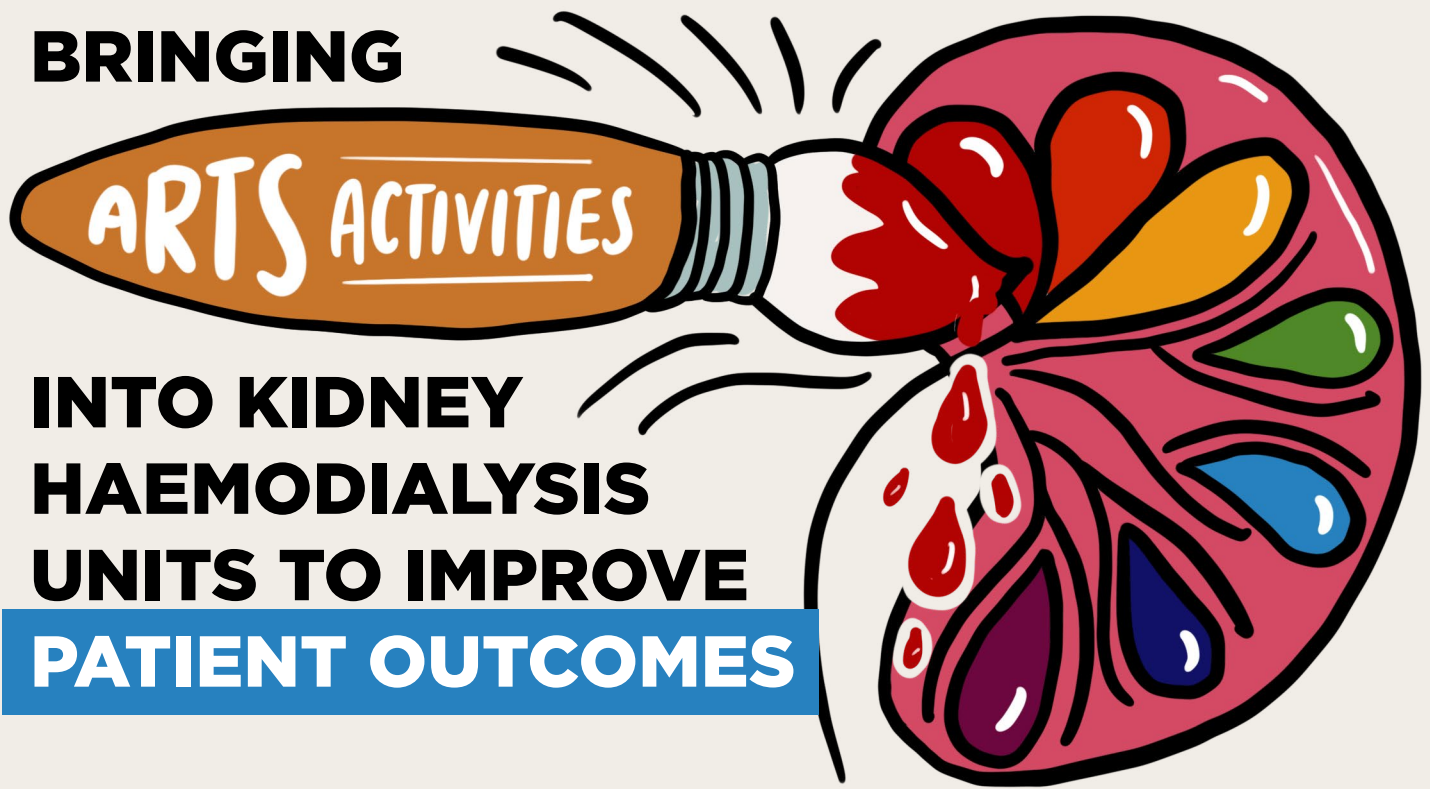


# BRINGING



# INTO KIDNEY HAEMODIALYSIS UNITS TO IMPROVE PATIENT OUTCOMES

## KEY MESSAGES

This policy brief was co-created by patients, families, researchers, healthcare and arts practitioners with an interest in or personal experience of kidney disease.

### CHALLENGE

- Maintaining patient well-being during kidney haemodialysis is crucial to treatment adherence and long term outcomes.
- However, haemodialysis is a treatment that requires attending hospital three times a week for four hours each visit.
- This treatment impacts profoundly on quality of life, mental health and well-being.

### SOLUTION - ARTS ACTIVITIES

Arts activities are a useful way to support and encourage people with kidney disease to manage the emotional challenges of haemodialysis and find meaning and connection during their treatment.

### BARRIERS

Barriers to arts activities include: lack of staff resource and knowledge to run interventions; geography and the limitations of access; infection control; funding; and the limited profile of the arts as a legitimate intervention.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Growing the evidence base to demonstrate the value of arts activities during kidney treatment; identifying arts champions within renal settings; further mapping innovative provision to build on what works and collaborations across the world.

## RESEARCH EVIDENCE

**Carswell, C., et al. (2020)**  
*A mixed-methods feasibility study of an arts-based intervention for patients receiving maintenance haemodialysis.*  
[BMC Nephrology 21.](#)

**Chilcot, J., et al. (2024)**  
*The identification and management of depression in UK Kidney Care: results from the Mood Maps Study.* [Journal of Renal Care, 50, 297-306.](#)

**Fancourt D, Finn S. (2019)**  
*What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review: World Health Organization.*  
[Regional Office for Europe: 2019.](#)

**KidneyCareUK (2022)**  
[Caring for people with kidney disease. Psychosocial health - a manifesto for action 2022.](#)

**National Centre for Creative Health**  
[ncch.org.uk](#)

## CORE CHALLENGES

Haemodialysis removes waste and extra fluid from the blood when the kidneys are no longer functioning properly. But the required haemodialysis treatment is arduous and very time consuming and impacts quality of life.



### Maintaining patient well-being

Maintaining patient well-being during haemodialysis is crucial to treatment adherence and long term outcomes. But treatment profoundly impacts on quality of life and mental health.



### A lack of practical support to help patients cope

Patients find that there is a lack of practical support to cope with the challenge of being *'an arm hooked up to a machine'* and find meaning and solace throughout treatment.



### Managing mental distress

Patients can experience stress, anxiety, social isolation and depression during their treatment.

*Some still say to me about [the arts programme], 'When are we doing more of that'? So some of the people were just really engaged with it and really enjoyed it. They felt that the time went so much quicker and they were looking forward to the people coming in. - Counsellor*



## SOLUTION - ARTS BASED ACTIVITIES

*"You know, it gives you something, you achieve something!"*

### WHAT ARE THEY

Arts activities use creative tasks in healthcare settings to improve the quality of life and healthcare experiences for patients on haemodialysis.

### HOW DO THEY WORK?

Engagement in the arts whilst undergoing health treatment has a beneficial impact on health and wellbeing ([Davies, Knuiman, & Rosenberg, 2015](#)).

Arts engagement is a crucial determinant of health like diet and exercise ([BMA, 2011](#)).

The existing evidence base demonstrates that arts-based interventions contribute to a reduction in anxiety, stress, pain and depression for patients across different healthcare settings ([Boyce, Bungay, Munn-Giddings, & Wilson, 2017](#); [Bungay, Munn-Giddings, & Wilson, 2014](#); [Staricoff & Clift, 2011](#)).

*Staff are really getting to know their patients in a new way - the arts can really do that and bring that to the situation.*

**- Arts Coordinator**



## THE RESEARCH

**1** The PAINT project based at Queen's University Belfast involved an international mapping exercise to identify the current provision of arts programmes for renal patients, co-produced with a consortium made up of members of the Renal Arts Group and project partners from Chong Hua Hospital, Philippines, Center for Arts and Health, University of Florida, Realta/Waterford Healing Arts and the World Health Organisation.

**2** The research included engaging directly with healthcare staff and arts practitioners to understand their experience; and what helps and hinders the implementation of arts activities in kidney haemodialysis units.

**3** Arts activities were described as instrumental in helping patients develop coping skills to handle the emotional toll of haemodialysis. This includes: creating a sense of meaning and reducing boredom whilst being incapacitated for long periods of time; enabling connection with other patients, staff and arts practitioners when usually isolated; and reframing their experience to one of positivity and self expression.

**4** Staff reflected that arts activities in renal haemodialysis units helped build deeper relationships with patients, and expressed enthusiasm for running sessions together.



*...just to lighten the mood of the whole thing as well so there was a bit of va vooom going on, there was energy, there was something different. Because sometimes it can feel a very sleepy place basically, and a very clinical place, with all the alarms going off, so I think people really enjoyed it.*

- Counsellor

**However, the use of arts activities are not wide-spread across kidney units despite strong evidence of their benefits.**

### BARRIERS

- Patient attitudes towards creativity
- Staff resource
- Infection control
- Financial resource
- Geography and access
- Limited profile of the arts

### ENABLERS

- Time and availability of patients
- Need for patients to alleviate boredom increases patients' motivation to participate
- Existing evidence for arts activities to improve the well-being of patients
- Staff enthusiasm and belief in person-centred approach to healthcare

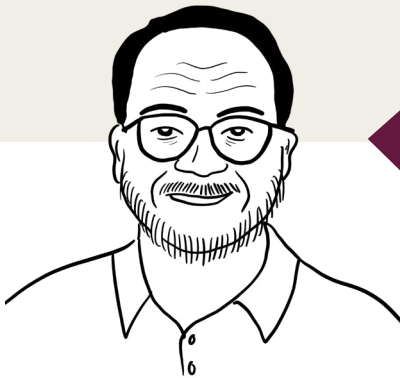
Grow the evidence base to demonstrate the value of arts based interventions during renal treatment.

2

Identify arts champions within renal teams to advocate for the arts, and hospital arts managers to work with staff to develop arts programmes for patients (see [National Arts in Hospitals Network](#)).

3

Further mapping of innovative provision to build on what works and improve collaborations across the world.



*Being on dialysis is like entering a psychological and mental desert. Arts and creativity can be that oasis to thrive for to replenish and rescue that psychological need.*

- Dialysis Patient

For more information on the research scan the QR code on the right or visit: <https://bit.ly/PAINT-QUB>

