6.5.5 Other ornaments

As discussed already, in contemporary healthcare design the focus now extends beyond clinical efficacy to encompass the holistic well-being of patients, staff, and visitors. Environmental elements, including ornaments—defined here as decorative objects such as sculptures, memorabilia, and personal artifacts—play a role in shaping healing environments. Like the elements discussed previously, these elements also contribute to creating spaces that are not only functional but also emotionally supportive and psychologically comforting[1].

So let's see what we, as spiritual healers, can learn from their use that may apply in our environments.

6.5.5.1. Understanding ornaments in healthcare settings

Ornaments in healthcare settings encompass a broad spectrum of decorative elements, including:

- **Personal artifacts** Items like family photographs, heirlooms, or personal memorabilia that patients bring into their rooms.
- **Art installations** We have already investigated pictures and art, which would include paintings and murals, but sculptures also fit into this category.
- **Natural elements** We have already looked at crystals, water features, indoor plants and gardens, however items made from natural materials also fit this criterion (e.g. items created with wood, driftwood, shells, rocks, etc.)
- **Cultural and historical objects** Items reflecting the cultural heritage or history relevant to the patient population or local community.

These ornaments serve multiple purposes: they humanize sterile environments, provide sensory stimulation, and offer psychological comfort.

[1] Gray, A. (2021) "Health Care Designers Find New Ways to Calm and Ease the Mind", *Architectural Digest* 2/1/2021 from www.architecturaldigest.com/story/health-care-designers-find-new-ways-to-calm-and-ease-the-mind

6.5.5.2. Psychological benefits of ornaments

The presence of ornaments can significantly influence patients' emotional states. The presence of meaningful ornaments can provide a psychological anchor, offering comfort to individuals in healthcare settings. Personal artifacts, for instance, help maintain a connection to one's identity and life outside the hospital, fostering a sense of normalcy and control.

- **Reduction of stress and anxiety** Hospital environments are often associated with fear and discomfort. Introducing visually pleasing ornaments—such as nature-themed artwork, soothing colours, and sculptures—can mitigate anxiety. Ornaments depicting serene landscapes or abstract calming patterns have been found to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation[2]. In assisted living and dementia care settings, "memory boxes" containing personal memorabilia have been shown to reduce anxiety and agitation by providing familiar cues and personal items also help them identify their rooms[3].


[4]

- **Enhancement of mood and emotional well-being** Sculptures and murals depicting human connection or hopeful themes foster emotional resilience[5]. A study in paediatric wards found that playful ornaments (e.g., cartoon murals, interactive art) reduced children's fear of medical procedures[6]. Displaying culturally significant ornaments or artifacts can foster a sense of belonging and representation, making patients feel seen and respected, and thereby improving their overall experience and satisfaction[7]. Indigenous artwork, religious symbols, or traditional motifs can provide comfort to individuals by reinforcing identity and familiarity. Personalized ornaments, such as family photographs or handcrafted decorations, can further enhance emotional well-being by creating a sense of home. A study found that dementia

[2] Kaplan, S. (1995) "The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework." *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* 15(3), pp.169-182.
[3] Huelat, B.J. (2009) "The healing experience" *Healthcare Design 2009 February*;9(2):pp.10-15.
[4] Camera image by congerdesign from Pixabay.
[5] Staricoff, R. (2004). "Arts in health: A review of the medical literature" *Arts Council England Research Report, 36*
[6] Hashemi, M., et al. (2015) "The impact of wall art in pediatric wards", *Health Environments Research & Design Journal.*
[7] Gray, A. (2021), as above.

patients in facilities with nostalgic decor (e.g. vintage photographs) exhibited fewer agitation episodes[8].

- **Supporting cognitive function** Ornaments, ranging from sculptures to intricate patterns, can evoke emotions and stimulate cognitive responses. Incorporating ornaments that stimulate the senses can aid cognitive function, particularly in patients with neurological conditions. Sensory-therapeutic objects or gardens, designed with diverse textures, colours, and scents, engage patients in meaningful activities that promote cognitive engagement and rehabilitation[9].
- **Encouraging social interaction** Ornaments can also facilitate social interactions among patients, visitors, and staff. Communal art pieces or culturally significant artifacts often serve as conversation starters, fostering a sense of community and shared experience within the healthcare setting.

6.5.5.3. Physiological benefits of ornaments

- **Pain perception and recovery rates** Research indicates that aesthetically pleasing environments can alter pain perception. The distraction theory suggests that engaging ornaments shift attention away from pain[10].
- **Improved sleep quality** Noise and harsh lighting in hospitals disrupt sleep, hindering recovery. A study found that soft lighting combined with nature-themed ornaments creates a restful ambiance[11]. It reported that patients in well-decorated rooms experienced better sleep quality than those in sterile environments[12].

6.5.5.4. Practical applications in healing environments

Patients in assisted living and dementia units are generally encouraged to bring some photographs and memorabilia to help them settle and make them feel at home. Familiar toys do the same for children. Interesting sculptures and other artworks encourage conversation

[8] Zeisel, J., Silverstein, N. M., Hyde, J., Levkoff, S., Lawton, M. P., & Holmes, W. (2003) "Environmental correlates to behavioral health outcomes in Alzheimer's special care units" *The Gerontologist, 43*(5), pp.697-711.
[9] Dinu Roman Szabo M, Dumitras A, Mircea DM, Doroftei D, Sestras P, Boscaiu M, Brzuszek RF, Sestras AF. "Touch, feel, heal. The use of hospital green spaces and landscape as sensory-therapeutic gardens: a case study in a university clinic" *Frontiers in Psychology. 2023 Nov* 24;14:1201030.
[10] McCaul, K. D., & Malott, J. M. (1984) "Distraction and coping with pain" *Psychological Bulletin, 95*(3), p.516.
[11] Huisman, E., Morales, E., van Hoof, J., & Kort, H. (2012) "Healing environment: A review of the impact of physical environmental factors on users", *Building and Environment, 58*, pp.70-80.
[12] Huisman, E., Morales, E., van Hoof, J., & Kort, H. (2012) "Healing environment: A review of the impact of physical environmental factors on users", *Building and Environment, 58*, pp.70-80.

and socialising, and provide a distraction from the sterility and routine of clinical environments.

6.5.5.5. *Challenges and considerations*

- **Cultural sensitivity** Ornaments must respect diverse cultural beliefs. For example, some patients may prefer religious symbols, while others favour secular designs[13]
- **Maintenance and hygiene** While ornaments offer numerous benefits, their implementation must consider infection control and safety. Items should be easy to clean and maintain to prevent the spread of pathogens. Materials chosen for ornaments should be durable and non-toxic, ensuring they do not pose risks to patients or staff. Antimicrobial materials and digital art displays are emerging solutions[14].

6.5.5.6. *Learning for spiritual healers*

Ornaments in healing environments can impact patient well-being by reducing stress, enhancing mood, fostering emotional resilience and even accelerating recovery. By thoughtfully integrating personal, cultural, and natural elements, healthcare facilities can also enhance emotional well-being, support cognitive function, and foster a sense of community.

As spiritual healers, we can also incorporate appropriate ornamental and cultural items into our environments, to promote client well-being and a sense of community. We need to consider client safety (e.g. tripping, cutting, breaking hazards) and how easy they will be to keep clean into any such decisions.

In Section 6, we have discussed lots of aspects and energies in our healing environments, many of them optional. When choosing, be selective as to which items fit best with the energy of spiritual healing and the energy you want to create in your healing environment. If you try to include too many things, you will just end up with a cluttered environment with lots of items competing for attention and confusing the energies. Some items bring very similar effects which don't need to be duplicated. Go with your instincts and perhaps just start with a few items you feel strongly about. You can always add more items in the future if you feel the need, or if you find that perfect item that you just can't resist!

[13] Nanda, U., Eisen, S., & Baladandayuthapani, V. (2012) "Art in healthcare environments: Effects on patient outcomes" *Health Environments Research & Design Journal, 5*(4), pp.1-15.
[14] Haque, S., & Pati, D. (2020) "Antimicrobial surfaces in healthcare design" *Health Environments Research & Design Journal, 13*(2), pp.45-60.

