

CPAM SPLATTER PAINT TENT

Abstract Expressionism Providing Catharsis for Healthcare Employees



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has looked to healthcare workers to lead the way. This immense pressure and responsibility has taken a huge toll on the people of the healthcare industry. According to a report from Elsevier Health 47% of healthcare workers in the US plan to leave their current role in the next 2-3 years.¹ The Splatter Paint Tent², a participatory art experience, was developed for healthcare workers to release tension and negative emotions built up from their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to this need for expression, the Center for Performing Arts Medicine (CPAM), Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU) Management, and Facilities Management at Houston Methodist designed and created a safe, contained space on unit specifically designed for employees to release their emotions by splattering paint.

PROJECT GOALS:

1. Relieve negative feelings of frustration, anger, defeat, and mental exhaustion
2. Create a safe space for healthcare workers to physically express themselves
3. Utilize multi-modal art making and listening outside of traditional measures to provide catharsis
4. Display care for the wellbeing of healthcare workers
5. Create a tool to address burnout of healthcare workers

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/04/19/new-survey-shows-that-up-to-47-of-us-healthcare-workers-plan-to-leave-their-positions-by-2025/?sh=392a478a395b>

² Video representing the Splatter Paint Tent at Houston Methodist https://youtu.be/f0_P6xO4Hy0



The summer of 2021 in Houston brought another huge wave of COVID³ positive patients to the hospital, straining employees and patient care. This wave brought along with it a dark cloud over healthcare workers. This third wave felt preventable after the wide release of vaccines but also endless with the dropping of mask mandates across the country. Healthcare workers felt helpless and angry that there seemed to be no end in sight. Patients were also becoming more and more aggressive with their opinions on COVID, people who wouldn't get vaccinated, denied it existed, those that wouldn't wear masks, and even sick family members demanding to visit vulnerable loved ones. This brewed intense anger in staff.

The need for the Splatter Paint Tent rose from discussions between Terry Clark, RN, BSN CVICU Nurse Manager and Elizabeth Laguaitte, MM, MT-BC CVICU's on-unit Music Therapist. Elizabeth is a CPAM employee who is integrated directly into the CVICU team. Elizabeth rounds and is involved in the day-to-day dealings of the unit. She regularly deals with end-of-life patients and in instances like the summer of 2021, provides staff care projects for unit staff.



The first iteration of the Splatter Paint Tent culminated in a paper mosaic work of art, composed of 26 individual 6-foot-wide canvases painted by the CVICU staff, which was a visual representation of the people and the physical expressions of catharsis from the CVICU. The Splatter Paint team from left to right: Jens Larsen, Facilities; Terry Clark, RN, BSN CVICU Nurse Manager; Elizabeth Laguaitte, MM, MT-BC CVICU Music Therapist; Shay Thornton Kulha, CPAM Project Manager; and Caroline Docwra, CPAM Project Specialist.

³ <https://covid-harriscounty.hub.arcgis.com/>

CPAM regularly provides programming and classes for employees across the hospital system and also provides Specific Event Response Staff Support opportunities facilitated by CPAM creative arts therapists in tandem with team leaders. The response-based programs utilize the arts to serve a unit in need of trauma processing or team building after a challenging event.

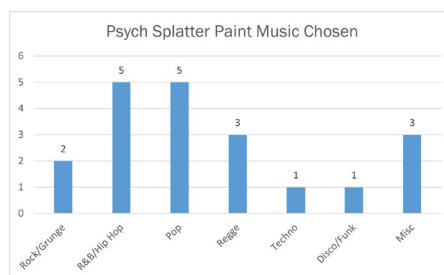
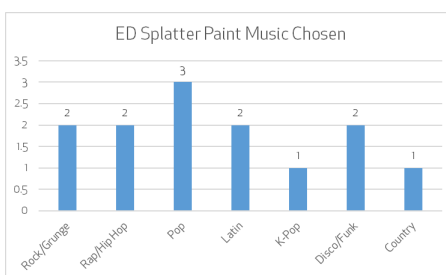
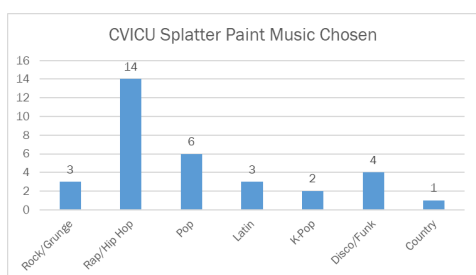
CPAM's art programs traditionally address self-care, wellness, relaxation, or even HR goals like communication and team building. The Specific Event Response programs respond to a specific event, and use a trauma-informed approach to plan, design, & facilitate a goal-oriented staff support initiative. So, each response program will be different based on the needs of the unit or department.



The needs of the CVICU required CPAM to think of an approach that welcomed negative emotions and provide an outlet of expression using the arts. Liz and Terry presented the model of a “smash room,” a room where people can vent their rage by destroying objects.⁴ That act of throwing or destroying something can feel great but how can we utilize art in this mode?

The Splatter Paint Tent references the era of Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism is an artistic movement of work that uses abstraction to convey strong emotional or expressive content⁵. Artists like Jackson Pollock, Louise Bourgeois, or Franz Kline displayed their emotions on a larger-than-life scale including their canvas, brush stroke, and materials. Pollocks paintings are most representative of this movement, often made by laying canvas on the floor and using expressive gestures to spill, splatter, and swipe paint all over the canvas. These large gestures made by the artist remain visible to the viewers of his work year after their initial creation.

For the Splatter Paint Tent, CPAM brought music together with visual art. Liz created 8 individual playlists on CDs with different genres of music: Classical, Latin, Country, Pop, Disco/Funk, Rap/Hip Hop, K-Pop, or Rock/Grunge. Each song was selected to bring energy and movement or was popular in each genre for releasing aggression. Rap/Hip Hop was the most popular music genre selected by staff. In the latest event, Psych employees were able to use the in-room Alexa and request their favorite music. Their selections were similar but allowed them to choose familiar music compared to a playlist.



⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rage_room

⁵ https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/abstract-expressionism/



To use the Splatter Paint Tent, each staff member was provided an individual packet of PPE or protective clothing to don, including a hair net, booties, gown, and gloves. This act of putting on PPE in a safe, fun space offered a change in the negative associations people made with PPE from COVID-19 to a positive experience.

Once staff was prepared to enter the tent, they followed the signs around the room to set their environment. They chose their playlist and placed it in the CD player, picked their own lighting by turning on LED lights, and picked one of many displayed tools to dip in paint and “let it all out” by splattering the canvas. Staff could choose from cotton balls, brooms, whisks, and actual paint brushes to flick, splatter, or throw at the canvas. They could be as forceful or relenting as they needed. All of these options gave the staff control over their space allowing for each person to create their own unique, individual experiences in the splatter paint tent. Locus of Control, the perception of control over a person’s own life, increase feelings of self-efficacy, in-turn improving burnout and work engagement.⁶ Employees have control over their environment and what they create in the Splatter Paint Tent.



The need for this type of catharsis is ongoing and as the needs arise, the Splatter Paint Tent travels to different units across the Houston Methodist system. The Splatter Paint Tent has shown to be a replicable program with department collaboration being the key to success. Each time the Splatter Paint Tent travels the goal and outcomes may shift as each hospital has a unique structure and culture. The Splatter Paint Tent needs a champion for the department, and their campus must work together to construct the space and share the experience with their staff. At Houston Methodist West, the Splatter Paint Tent was a month-long HR initiative to bring some fun into the workplace and functioned more as a team-building activity for employees. Groups of people scheduled time together to paint and the paintings were more controlled.

Since the initial event in the CVICU, the Splatter Paint Tent has been installed in the Emergency Department and the Psychiatric Unit at Houston Methodist in the Texas Medical Center. In the iteration for the Emergency Department, there was a marked difference in the use of the Splatter Paint Tent. This iteration was a year after the first Splatter paint tent in the CVICU and the environment of the ED was a change from the smaller CVICU.

⁶ Bernales-Turpo D, Quispe-Velasquez R, Flores-Ticona D, Saintila J, Ruiz Mamani PG, Huancahuire-Vega S, Morales-García M, Morales-García WC. Burnout, Professional Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction as Predictors of Job Performance in Health Care Workers: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement. *J Prim Care Community Health*. 2022 Jan-Dec;13:21501319221101845. doi: 10.1177/21501319221101845. PMID: 35603465; PMCID: PMC9125607.



The employees of the Emergency Department saw the Splatter Paint Tent as a safe space for them to express themselves and their positive and negative emotions. In this iteration of the Splatter Paint Tent, we received more canvases where employees had written out any negative emotions along with painting. Participants commented on how they felt, “stressed and angry” even though they were working less days and commented on pay increases for night shift, indicating that employees felt free and safe to express their concern and feelings.



“Over the past year and a half, I've been feeling stressed and angry. I feel like I don't want to be here even though I'm here less than 4 days a week.
Splattering paint was fun, but can we break stuff next time?”

Comparatively in the CVICU, paintings were abstract but included handprints and the words CVICU. Staff would also draw hearts, lungs, and other organs as the CVICU oversees transplant patient care. Comments from the CVICU were more exclamatory but still conveyed the great amount of stress staff endures.



“I have been feeling extremely defeated at work, but this little moment truly let me step out of the headspace I was in. It felt so special and thought out, and it felt so nice that someone/people had taken the time put in all the work to build something so thoughtful for the staff.”

For every iteration, each participant shared their experience of the Splatter Paint Tent via a written survey. They rated how the experience helped with their reported stress levels, feelings of compassion fatigue, cognitive weariness or mental exhaustion, if they felt more engaged at work, closer to their colleagues and if the event encouraged a more positive attitude towards Houston Methodist.

SPLATTER PAINT TENT COMPARISON DATA

CVICU PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESPONSES:

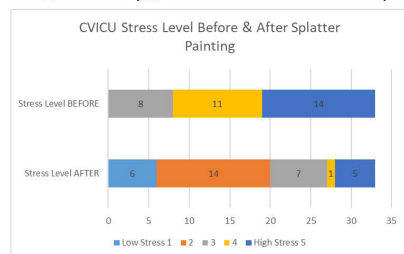
Total Number of Participants: 49

Number of Surveys received: 32

Average stress levels 1(low) to 5(high)

4.19 – Before

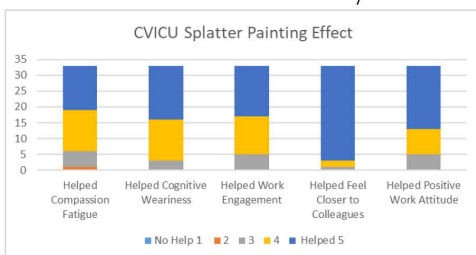
2.56 – After (39% decrease in stress level)



Impact of Splatter Paint Tent

1(no help) to 5(helped)

- 4.22 – Helped with compassion fatigue
- 4.44 – Helped with cognitive weariness or mental exhaustion
- 4.34 – Made me feel more engaged at work
- 4.88 – Made me feel closer to colleagues at Houston Methodist
- 4.77 – More positive attitude towards Houston Methodist after activity



ED PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESPONSES:

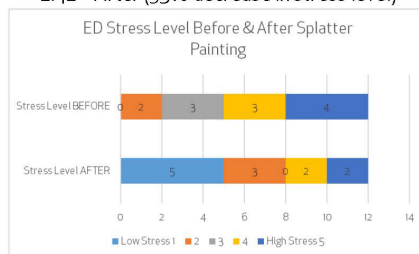
Total Number of Participants: 36

Number of Surveys received: 12

Average stress levels 1(low) to 5(high)

3.75 – Before

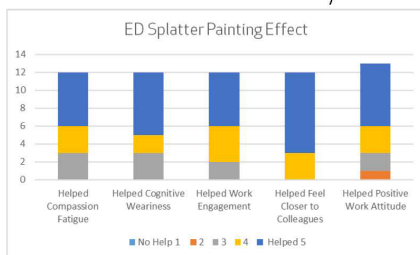
2.42 – After (35% decrease in stress level)



Impact of Splatter Paint Tent

1(no help) to 5(helped)

- 4.25– Helped with compassion fatigue
- 4.33 – Helped with cognitive weariness or mental exhaustion
- 4.33 – Made me feel more engaged at work
- 4.75 – Made me feel closer to colleagues at Houston Methodist
- 4.58 – More positive attitude towards Houston Methodist after activity



PSYCH PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESPONSES:

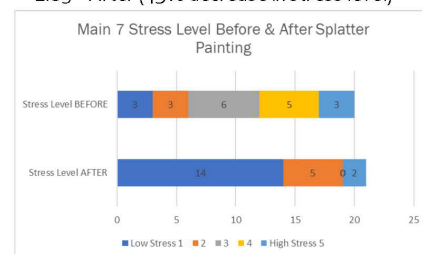
Total Number of Participants: 30

Number of Surveys received: 21

Average stress levels 1(low) to 5(high)

5.17 – Before

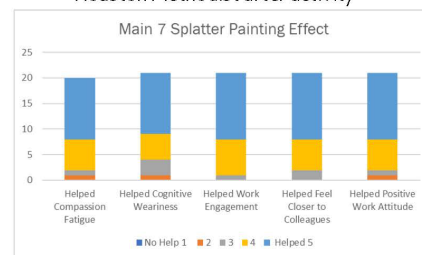
2.83 – After (45% decrease in stress level)



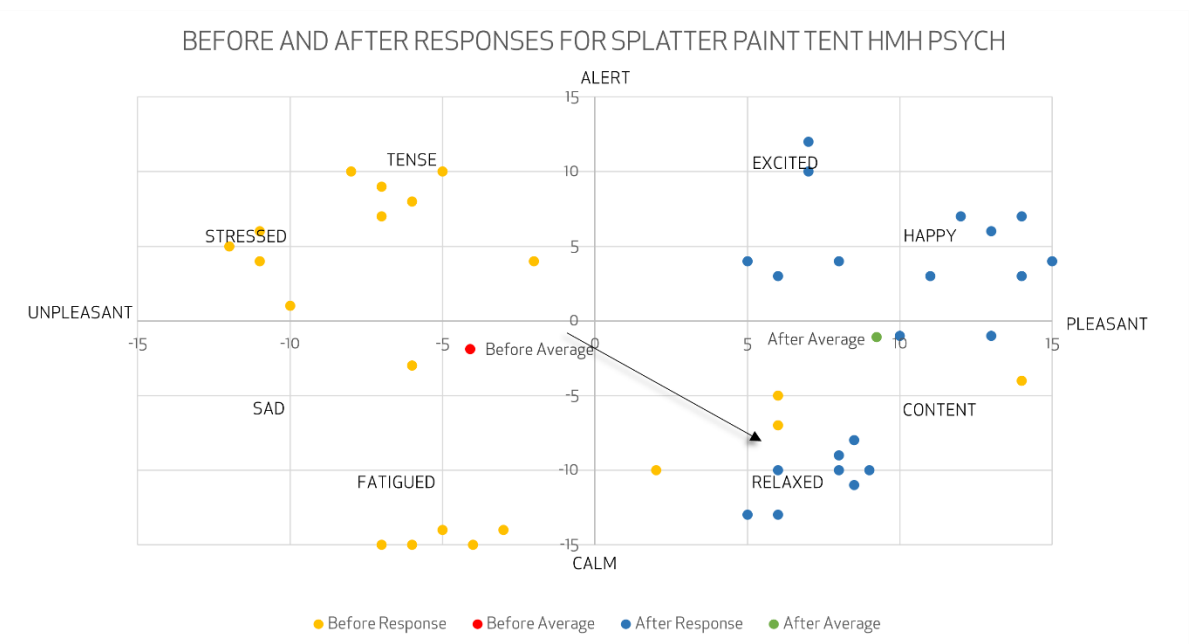
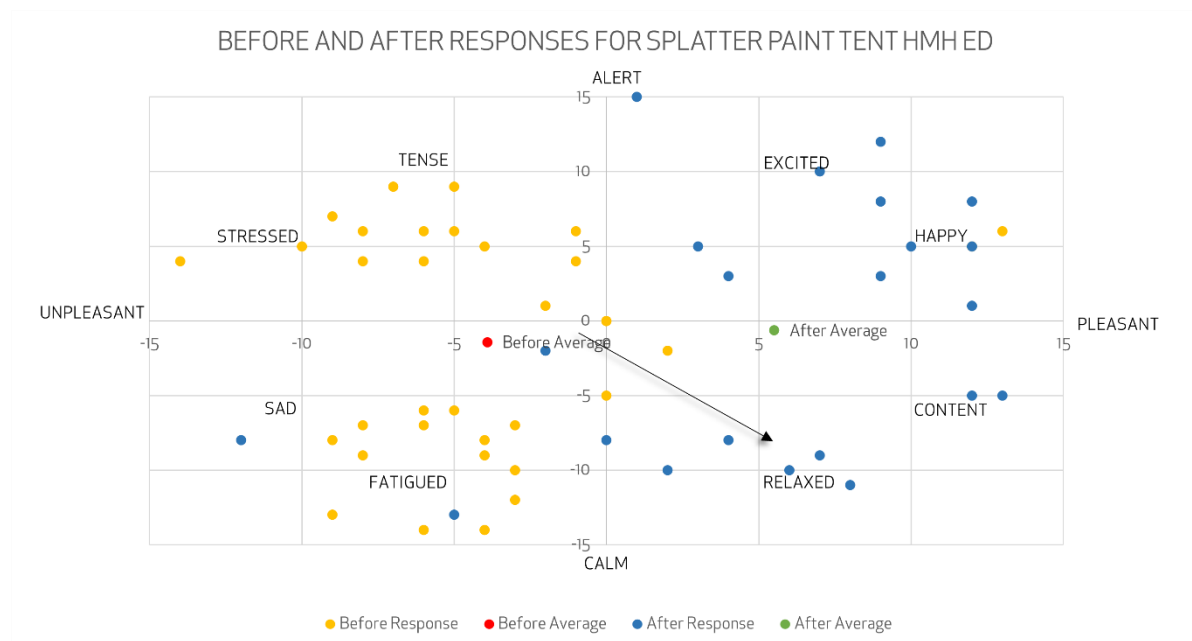
Impact of Splatter Paint Tent

1(no help) to 5(helped)

- 4.45– Helped with compassion fatigue
- 4.33 – Helped with cognitive weariness or mental exhaustion
- 4.57 – Made me feel more engaged at work
- 4.52 – Made me feel closer to colleagues at Houston Methodist
- 4.47 – More positive attitude towards Houston Methodist after activity



Participants of the ED & Psych Splatter Paint Tent events marked their mood before and after the experience. The graph shows a shift towards a “relaxed” mood after the Splatter Paint Tent experience.



Survey results from each iteration have shown that the Splatter Paint Tent is an effective platform for releasing negative emotions in a safe, artistic way. Reported stress levels reduce 40 % on average. Overall, the Splatter Paint Tent, can shift one’s mood from stressed to relaxed and improve employee engagement with their team and leadership.