



Evaluation Report of the PAMEMMAZI Program

November 2017 – December 2018

(excluding May & August 2018)

This report presents the evaluation results and conclusions of PAMEMMAZI's work at the General Oncology Hospital of Kifissia "Oi Aghioi Anargyroi" from the onset of its activities in November 2017 until December 2018. The aim of this report is to inform all interested parties about the effect these programs have had on the community that they serve.

Goals and activities of PAMEMMAZI

PAMEMMAZI offers psychosocial support to oncology patients and their families through engaging them in meaningful, creative and educational programs offered in a specially-designed and welcoming space in the hospital. In this space they can:

- relax,
- do exercises specifically tailored to their own needs and abilities,
- choose the activity or complementary therapy of their liking,
- get informed about physical and emotional care,
- socialize, share experiences and thoughts,
- develop new skills,
- have fun,
- boost their sense of control and choice.

Programs are offered systematically in the clinics and in the outpatient waiting area of the Day Clinic.

Range of activities

From November 2017 until December 2018, 1.212 patients and family members have participated in PAMEMMAZI's activities, 60% of whom filled out an evaluation form. During this period, we offered 227 sessions of numerous activities which by indication are the following: crafts, drawing, yoga exercises, aromatherapy, art therapy, music therapy, information sessions about healthy eating, oral hygiene and corrective make-up techniques.

Research behind PAMEMMAZI's programs

Traditional medicine has systematically looked at curing the body; however, comprehensive approach to patient care is necessary (body, emotions and mind) in order to better manage every illness. In the middle of the 20th century the groundwork for psychosomatic medicine was set (Dunbar and Alexander) debunking the mind and body duality model of the illness which supports that the mind and the body do not interact and affect one another but are distinct and separate. Now a strong connection between mind, behavior and immunology is being advocated (*Brain, Behavior and Immunity, Vol 53, March 2016*), where chronic anxiety, stress, anger and depression are believed to greatly influence the function of the immune system.

Cancer patients and their families in particular, due to the nature of the illness and its therapy, experience high levels of stress and deal with many problems in every facet of their lives. Cancer itself and its treatment causes changes in their appearance, exhaustion, pain, chemo brain, difficulty in reading, isolation, fear, social stigmatization and many other side-effects and social consequences.

Psychosomatic therapies which have proven to be successful are exercise, special dietary choices, occupational therapy, techniques for relaxation and better quality of sleep, music, art, yoga and meditation, to mention just a few.

These beneficial changes have a positive impact on patients, fueling them with emotional strength to undergo the often-complicated cancer treatment with renewed optimism and resilience, helping them benefit from the practical help and advice they receive from others who live through similar situations and feel like they are not alone in their journey, and making them feel seen and accepted by society at large.

Program results

Included below are some results from the evaluation forms/questionnaires that participants filled out.

1. **Enjoyment/Relaxation.** In response to the question “What gave you the most pleasure today during your time with us?” **50%** stated “I did something I like doing.” **65%** stated “I relaxed.”
2. **Renewed perception of the hospital.**
 - They returned to the hospital to participate again in our programs since the hospital is a place where they can access activities that fill them with positive feelings.
 - Several stated that our programs offer them an “escape” from their hospital stays and make them feel as if they are not treated as patients.

3. **The program is very popular among participants.** 81% said that they liked the activities they participated in, “Very much”, 15% said “A lot”, 4% said “Quite a bit.” No one said, “A little” or “Not at all.”
4. **Meeting patients’ needs.** Many patients and caregivers asked for art therapy, music therapy, aromatherapy, and yoga sessions to be held in their hospital rooms and we addressed their need immediately. They also asked for informative brochures on the following topics: aromatherapy, exercises for the joints and the eyes and breathing techniques to help with relaxation, as well as written instructions for making soap and various handicrafts, and knitting.
5. **Feeling of being capable and giving back.** Beyond the immediate pleasure of participating in an activity, patients feel productive and capable of giving back to their loved ones. This comes in the middle of a difficult period in their lives when they feel totally dependent on family members and/or others whom they feel they have over-burdened. Items, made with care and love, are often given as a gift to their caregivers.
6. **Acceptance and recognition from their immediate environment.** It is very important—in this time of insecurity and bodily dysfunction—for patients to feel that they are capable of creating something beautiful which is praised by other patients, caregivers, and the medical and nursing staff of the hospital. Proof of this was the immense satisfaction expressed by participants in our drawing activity when they saw their creations displayed on hospital walls among works done by other patients.
7. **The potential for expression, communication and socialization.** The various activities and complementary therapies organized by PAMEMMAZI offer patients and their families the opportunity to voice emotions and thoughts which until this point had been kept “hidden” so as not to burden each other. 44% of those asked stated that the activities of PAMEMMAZI gave them the opportunity to communicate with other people. Participation in group activities with a shared goal, such as the creation of a patchwork blanket by 28 patients and caregivers, was a successful example of a means for better communication and socialization. It was also noted that these activities often give meaning to their hospital stays, encourage them to set short-term goals and make them feel satisfied when these goals are met.
8. **Informing participants on taking better care of themselves** through presentations about diet, oral hygiene, and corrective make-up. 60% approves of the contents of the information sessions and the speakers, while many stated that they enjoyed the discussion and the interactive manner used. During the discussions about a healthy diet and oral hygiene, they took notes and requested more details and information.
9. **Knowledge about the available complementary therapies which may help them better manage the illness and its treatment through experiential knowledge.**

Many participants stated that they were not aware of these choices. Easy access and participation to PAMEMMAZI's programs gave them the opportunity to try them and choose activities that help them and which they can pursue outside the hospital setting.

10. Further findings.

- Patients and families that participated in our programs after being encouraged to do so by doctors and/or nursing staff and/or social workers and psychologists, felt confident and calm, and accepted the beneficial effect of the activity on their psychological well-being.
- The kindness, positive and joyful attitude, empathy and spirit of cooperation displayed by the volunteers is catching, inspires patients and their families and affects them in a positive and substantial manner.

What patients said

We include comments made by some patients and caregivers as expressed—in their own words – in the evaluation forms of the various activities.

Music therapy

"I felt that I was elsewhere, not in a hospital. I lived the experience!"

"I sang again. Music is medicine!"

"Today's music therapy experience in the room was a gift; I relaxed and during the most difficult hours, everything became more beautiful."

"We need to let ourselves go so that we can accept your creative efforts. Congratulations for making us feel like travelers and not clients!"

"I thought my feet were in the sea; I relaxed; it was wonderful."

"Expand the activities in Crete too. Congratulations."

Corrective make-up/Facial care

"Everything was perfect...keep it up, it's worth the time...especially in the hospital...doing something creative."

"I became prettier in the hospital; I didn't expect this."

"I'm happy you're here and I met you. There is socialization of patients and no one feels excluded from society."

"These activities are much needed. They help our psychological well-being."

"I learned something I didn't know; I am so excited, and I don't want it to end; I like it very much, especially here, in this environment."

Knitting

"I forget that I am a patient."

Yoga

"Congratulations. If only something similar existed elsewhere too."

Aromatherapy

"This is the loveliest thing that has happened to me in the hospital."

"It helped me a little to relieve the pain."

"I feel "alive" even for a brief time...and forget about this gloomy illness."

"I felt pain relief using the lavender as an essential oil in the room but also in a cream which my daughter made after having attended your presentation in the Day Clinic. I thank you very much for this."

Nutrition sessions

"Here's one good thing that happens inside the hospital. Thank you!"

Handicrafts/Drawing

"It was the most stress-relieving experience I've had in a hospital."

"Everything was wonderful. Drawing the tree of life—wonderful and creative. The volunteers are performing a labor of love for the amusement of oncology patients. As far as Mr. Stratos is concerned, he offered us two creative hours. I thank him for this."

"What's happening is lovely. I feel more capable (stronger)."

Art Therapy

"Fantastic activity; creative use of time; lovely emotions."

Oral Hygiene

"Original; I haven't seen this in any other hospital. All activities are useful because the patients are all going through hard times."

Conclusions

1. **Continuation of the program at the hospital.** 99% stated that PAMEMMAZI should continue offering these programs in the hospital.
2. **Change in the attitudes towards dealing with the illness and the creation of a patient-controlled space** where they can find joy and useful information and build

valuable skills, leaving their worries and anxieties behind, even for a short time. In this way they are better able to deal with their hospital stay.

3. **Emphasis on normality during treatment.** Admittance to the hospital is connected to their expectation of participation in the activities of PAMEMMAZI. Participating in PAMEMMAZI's activities boosts their sense of control over their life and health and helps them feel that their life continues during treatment.
4. **Creation of a community** that fights against isolation and stigmatization of cancer patients through the active engagement of volunteers in all activities.
5. **The next steps for PAMEMMAZI.** Our close and productive cooperation with the hospital on encouraging patients and families to engage in our programs is a decisive factor in helping them gain maximum benefits from these programs.

The PAMEMMAZI team