

A Healing Environment



Students from the Jazz Elites of Cicero-North Syracuse High School serenade patient Caroline Hosler.

On a recent Saturday morning stretched into afternoon on 4 South Irving, the oncology unit at Crouse Hospital. Caroline Hosler was resting comfortably, waiting for her husband to visit, when Caryn Patterson entered her room.

“May our Jazz Elites sing for you?” Patterson asked. Hosler, of Baldwinsville, nodded, and soon was enveloped in the uplifting melodies of the Big Band-era favorite *In the Mood*, harmonized by six teen vocalists from Cicero-North Syracuse High School, led by choral director Patterson.

This scene is just one of many being played out at Crouse through an all-encompassing initiative that focuses on what is known as the healing environment. According to Chief Quality Officer Derrick Suehs, the purpose is to make the hospital environment seem less “clinical” and more soothing for patients. In fact, studies show that a whole range of environmental factors — including lighting, color, views, art and sound — have a powerful healing and therapeutic effect.

Warm colors, artwork displays, quiet areas, pet therapy and music are just some of the ideas Crouse has implemented to make the hospital more pleasant and calming for patients and staff.

“A patient is not just someone with an illness,” says Suehs. “A patient is a person who happens to be ill, but who may have a family, pets, job, and a whole host of other concerns and

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Waiting rooms are being renovated to make them “more like living rooms,” according to Nancy Stewart, director of volunteer services and spiritual care. Recent changes to the Emergency Department included a comfortable new layout and soft pastels painted on the walls.

Upgrades to the Pediatric Cardiac Catheterization Suite include recliners in the waiting room so anxious parents can relax. The procedure space will soon feature a child-friendly mural painted by young artists from the Learning Disability Association of Central New York, under the guidance of Ann Clarke, chair of the department of art in Syracuse University’s College of Visual and Performing Arts. The project also involves collaboration with the Everson Museum of Art and art students at S.U.

To make public areas of the hospital more aesthetically pleasing, artwork by Syracuse City School District students graces corridors. A third floor gallery will permanently exhibit color photography by retired Syracuse University professor Bob Gates. When families, visitors and staff need a quiet moment, or even solitude, they can retreat to a serene chapel, complete with relaxing sounds from a flowing water fountain, or to the “quiet zone,” a small area off the main cafeteria.

Syracuse Symphony Orchestra Music Director Daniel Hege believes that “music has the power to heal.” The CNS Jazz Elites did not just entertain Hosler, they touched her deeply as well, perhaps proving the maestro’s point.

“Their voices blending together were so moving,” said Hosler following the teens’ visit. “I’m very impressed that they would spend a Saturday afternoon coming to Crouse to sing for us.”

From music to art to visiting pets, Crouse is creating an environment that helps decrease fears and anxieties and encourages relaxation. “While medicine treats the body, the healing environment aims to soothe the spirits and the soul,” says Suehs.