

Open Window Project:

The Devising, Implementation and Curation, of an Interactive, Applied Arts and Connectedness Intervention in a Bone Marrow Transplantation Unit

<i>D. Roche</i>	<i>4th Promise Media</i>
<i>S. Agamanolis</i>	<i>Media Lab Europe</i>
<i>C. Cullinan</i>	<i>Media Lab Europe</i>
<i>F. Hegarty</i>	<i>St. James's Hospital</i>
<i>L. Higgins</i>	<i>St. James's Hospital</i>
<i>Prof. S. McCann</i>	<i>St. James's Hospital</i>

The diagnosis of Leukemia is a devastating one for both the patient and his/her family. Until relatively recently, the outcome for adult patients was extremely poor. With the advent of stem cell transplantation the situation has been radically altered in the last twenty years. The National Bone Marrow Transplant Centre for adults was opened in St. James's Hospital in 1984 and to date has carried out transplants on six hundred patients. The treatment is intensely complex and also carries an inherent risk. All patients suffer severe side effects from the treatment associated with the transplant and in some cases (20 to 30%) death will result from the transplant itself, from complications thereof or from recurrence of the disease. All patients are nursed in a single air conditioned en suite room in the Eugene Murray bone marrow transplant unit in the Denis Burkitt ward in St. James's Hospital. Patients may spend up to six weeks confined to this area of the hospital. The feeling of isolation compounds a sense of fear of the unknown and worry about the possible outcome. Isolation may lead to depression, anxiety, anger, difficulty in communicating with medical staff and relatives and resistance to cooperation with the therapies involved. In order to relieve the sense of isolation, reduce levels of anxiety and depression and increase the overall well being of the patient during their stay in the transplant unit, the 'Open Window' project was devised.

The Open Window system is an ambient, 'Virtual Window', which is projected in the patient's room, and which aims to ameliorate the adverse psychological conditions described above.

The system achieves this response by employing a combination of site-specific, audio/visual art works, and 'live' images of natural landscapes, which have personal significance for the viewer. Other contributing artists, provided with camera-phones, act as 'Mobile Windows', capturing images and relaying them over a mobile phone network to the system, for projection in the rooms, thus engendering a greater sense of connectivity in the patients.

The art work that is active on the system is a video installation which uses natural landscapes and cloud development as its central themes. This is coupled with a sound-scape, which incorporates the human voice and textural music.

The various artistic challenges that arise out of this intervention include:

- How to create and curate work, which ideally should be tailored for individual needs but due to working constraints, must be executed for viewing by many.
- How to re-define, and reposition the role of the artist within the inherent sensitivities of this context.
- Defining how art-works can help in breaking down the sense of isolation felt by the patients.
- Examining to what degree art can be a mediator between the patient and their own internal experience.

The system is active in two patient rooms in the Denis Burkitt Bone Marrow Transplant Unit and is being evaluated in a prospective way.

Presented by Denis Roche with an introduction by Professor Shaun McCann.