

## ABSTRACT:

Nature contact can improve health outcomes such as stress relief, recovery time decrease, mental health, and social health. Multiple studies have been conducted that demonstrate the positive impact that nature contact plays on health outcomes. Although this correlation is acknowledged, there is still disconnect of evidence and contemporary medical practices. By observing how nature contact influences patient and caregiver well-being of cancer patients at the Vermont Cancer Center, I will recommend how patient care can be further improved. The healing garden, located beside the infusion bays and examination rooms, serves as a place where patients and visitors can observe or visit during their visits to the clinic; however this feature is currently underutilized. In order to understand the intention of the space, current use patterns and how to improve the space to meet the needs of cancer patients I use three strategies: (1) a series of eight interviews with individuals involved in creating and maintaining the garden, (2) 20 surveys completed by nursing staff at the Vermont Cancer Center and (3) 50 surveys completed by patients and visitors in the waiting room and infusion bay. Typically responses indicated that increased awareness of the space, water features and spaces for tables would increase the number of patients positively impacted by visiting the space each year. Responses have indicated that individuals who have spent time in the garden have experienced respite, stress relief and a deeper understanding and appreciation for life outside of the hospital. Through these findings, recommendations regarding outreach and accessibility will be made to those involved in developing and maintaining the space.

KEYWORDS: HEALING, GARDEN, CANCER, HOSPITAL, WELLNESS, VERMONT, FLETCHER ALLEN HEALTH CARE