

Painters exhibit work in cancer centre corridor

Art helps patients cope with trauma

Patients being treated at a cancer centre are now able to view works of art during their stay, rather than cold and unfriendly clinical surroundings. Health reporter **Dave Blackhurst** visited the hospital to find out how the initiative is helping them

CANCER patients are being treated in a centre, which is fast becoming North Staffordshire's newest art gallery.

And already the uplifting and soothing nature of works by the cream of local painters is helping put them in the right frame of mind to fight what is the area's second biggest killer.

The University Hospital of North Staffordshire and a collective of artists from Fenton-based Theartbay Gallery are behind the imaginative scheme.

It began with the opening of the hospital's new £30 million cancer centre in July and now a dozen paintings look down from the unit's entrance and a corridor leading to one of its cancer treatment machines.

The restful pictures are seen by hundreds of patients, relatives and staff passing by every week.

Meanwhile, the artists enjoy exposure for their work, including some who have never had their pieces mounted in an exhibition.

At present, only a handful of painters have been selected for the makeshift healing gallery.

But their pictures will be interchanged with others from the 50 artists from Theartbay in future months and years.

And now the scheme has been dubbed a success, dozens more paintings, together with pottery pieces and sculptures, will adorn the rest of North Staffordshire's £400 million super-hospital currently taking shape and due to open in 2012.

Senior clinical nurse matron Gill Adamson said: "Patients love the paintings and have told us how much they help them cope with such a traumatic time.

"When we first opened, people were impressed by the building, especially compared to the cramped and fragmented facilities it replaced.

"But they said it felt a bit new and clinical, so these works of art are making a difference to the place which will get even better once paintings go in all the areas."

Prints of the works have been bought with charitable funds donated to the hospital.

The first artist under the spotlight is Harry Davies, from Penkhull, whose seven contributions, under his trademark signature of Aitch, follow a floral theme.



ON DISPLAY: Work by local artists Harry Davies, Vicky Mount and Frederick Phillips. Below, Harry with former cancer patient Sheila Cashmore.

Pictures: Malcolm Hart and Mark Scott

He has twice been made redundant from the pottery industry and is now trying to make a living as a painter.

Mr Davies said: "I feel privileged to have my work on show here.

"One of the paintings started life as a postcard, but the others were done with this therapeutic location in mind.

"I wanted them to be uplifting, but calming at the same time."

Frederick Phillips, of Stoke, has one work called Interface on show, which depicts the view through the entrance of a stately home into a park beyond.

Mr Phillips, who was taught in Burslem Art School and also spent 17 years working in Chicago, the U.S., before returning to the Potteries three years ago, said: "I believe in the power of art in the healing process and hope I can contribute.

"I have had exhibitions in some informal places before, but never in a hospital and I think this is an excellent initiative."

Breast cancer patient Sheila Cashmore,

aged 57, from Longton, said: "I had chemotherapy treatment a few years ago in the cramped old facilities, but this place is terrific and the art will make a difference to how people cope with their illness."

Hospital trust chairman Mike Brereton said: "It's wonderful these superb local painters are making such an enormous contribution to the place. Their work adds a real quality to the hospital and raises people's awareness of high-class art."

Do you think art can help people to cope with difficult situations? Email us at letters@thesentinel.co.uk

