

## From gender-specific medicine to a kind of medicine.

### The story of an all-woman adventure: art therapy at the P.O. Martini Oncology Unit

Our story is set within the City of Turin Local Health Authority, where four women have brought to life a project that cost nothing at all, simply by “optimising” (as they say nowadays) valuable health authority resources. It was not us who decided that it should be a group of women to undertake this initiative; it was not us who decided that the patients able to take part in the experimental art therapy project *Rebirth as a Lotus Flower*, should be of the female sex, but sometimes things just happen; we could put it down to sensitivity.

When women, in the workplace as in life, find the fertile terrain of solidarity, intelligence and enterprise, they sow hope, skill and trust and they reap a grateful gaze and a smile that restore meaning to the work we do every day.

And this is a women’s story, one that started by chance, from the positive need of Gabriella, a health worker and art therapist who works for the Department of Prevention, to draw on her experience and professional skills to help others through art therapy. Gabriella’s desire was “intercepted” by Loredana, who also works for the authority in the communication for the Oncology Network sector, and she discussed it with Stefania, head of the Oncology Unit at P.O. Martini, with a view to developing a potential project with cancer patients in the follow-up phase.

But sometimes life sends us messages and it just so happened that about this time, Stefania met Monia, who was preparing a thesis regarding oncology for the Course on the facilitation of helping relationships - psychosynthetic psychology section, titled *Creativity and human potential: growing through shapes*.

This led to a meeting between the four in which Loredana and Stefania were admiring witnesses to the synergy, enthusiasm and positivity

of Gabriella and Monia. It was not long before the *Art Therapy – Rebirth as a Lotus Flower* project became a reality.

We had to overcome certain obstacles, such where to hold the activity; but help came from another woman, the Healthcare Director of Martini Hospital, Elisabetta, who made the management department’s board room available. Within a few days, that board room had become a magic place full of colour paper, marker pens, coloured pencils, paints, brushes and natural and recycled materials to be used to express thoughts, feelings and states of mind.

Using drawing, collage, painting and colour, “all words”, even unspoken ones, can be expressed: “scenes of everyday life”, fears, pains, joys and hopes blend with the colours, and sometimes also the tears, but very often the laughter, companionship and will to live of the participants.

Art therapy, a type of medicine without contraindications, facilitates self-expression, meditation, change and personal growth. It allows people to make sense of what is happening in their lives, by making it more comprehensible and manageable, even starting merely from the world of the imagination, it boosts self-esteem, a factor that is “generally” protective for the health of everyone and, if it is gender-specific medicine, we like it even better.

Il team ArteTerapia

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## Report of the WHO Regions for Health Network workshop on gender health, women’s health, men’s health strategy

Lugano, April 17-18, 2018

Gender-specific medicine is an important aspect of the broader and more complex subject of “gender health”, which also considers the social and environmental dynamics associated with it, and which provided a focus for the Who workshop held on 17 and 18 April 2018 in Lugano. The meeting, which was titled “*Gender health, women’s health, men’s health strategy*”, was organised by the Regions For Health Network, a WHO body responsible for staging initiatives that promote the development of regional health policy.

The main aim of the meeting was to develop skills and competences regarding the gender-specific approach to health; it also provided a valuable occasion for sector professionals to discuss the WHO’s main European initiatives regarding gender and health through experiences, contributions and subnational examples of the implementation of current women’s health strategies and the development of a men’s health strategy.

The main speaker, Isabel Yordi Aguirre, supervisor of the Gender and Health programme organised by the WHO European Regional Office, immediately clarified that there is still a certain amount of confusion, as well as a certain degree of resistance, regarding the concept of gender, which is often incorrectly considered simply a synonym of sex.

### *The gender concept and gender mainstreaming*

Whereas there are no doubts that sex is determined by the biological and functional characteristics of each individual, it is not yet universally clear that gender, on the other hand, represents a cultural construction, or better, the representation and encouragement of behaviours that