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Web Posted: 05/01/2009 12:00 CDT

Tranquility Room offers relaxation space for BAMC workers

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By Tracy Hobson Lehmann - Express-News [RSS](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [SAVE](#)

The sable walls, soothing music, trickling fountain and candlelight suggest a spa. But the serene setting is a stark contrast to the hospital environment on the other side of the door of the Tranquility Room at Brooke Army Medical Center.

The fourth-floor room, which opened Thursday, is the final piece of a caregiver respite initiative to fall into place, said Col. Kathryn Gaylord, program director. "Caring for the Caregiver: The Provider Resiliency Intervention," begun in late 2007, has focused attention on stress relief for the approximate 300 staff members in the burn center.

Now with the Tranquility Room, burn center staffers and volunteers have a place to escape, albeit briefly. Appointments for one of the two seats in the room are limited to 30 minutes.

Smaller than an average living room, the space is infused with the high-tech tools for unwinding. A massage chair stimulates circulation and works tense muscles, and a large black leather chaise — a Symmetron Wave Chair — rotates gradually for a floating sensation. The soft music is specially engineered, and the staff is even testing a meditation mask that uses special strobe lights to induce relaxation.

Dr. Alan Young, the hospital's director of rehabilitation services, said the holistic approach worked when he went in with a "blistering headache."

He settled onto the chaise, which stimulates the vestibular system. "By the time I was about 10 minutes into it, I felt pretty good," he said. "That headache didn't return."

Architect and interior designer Johnna Barrett of Barrett Design in Atlanta brought together elements that stimulate all the senses. The brown walls and black ceiling create a dark environment. Resin panels with a wavy pattern are illuminated with royal blue LED lights to give the illusion of water flowing over one wall. A flat-panel screen hanging on the blue wall projects bucolic images.

Barrett, who has designed relaxation spaces for spas, corporations and private homes, says BAMC's Tranquility Room posed special needs. "What the people in this unit are seeing and experiencing on a daily basis is so much more difficult to bear, so their need for a space like this is so much more intense. Everything had to be just right."

And no materials could pose a risk of infection. Essential oils for aromatherapy are emitted from a nebulizer so there's not a risk of dispersing bacteria. Where she normally would have used carpeting for a soft floor, Barrett applied synthetic wood so there would be no fiber concerns.

With all the high-tech gadgets, the small space carried a sizable price tag — but the \$50,000 cost was covered by a designated donation to Operation Comfort, a local nonprofit that focuses primarily on helping wounded service members and their families at BAMC.

"We understand the stresses the burn staff must go through," said Janis Roznowski, Operation Comfort president. "It was worth every penny."

Gaylord vouches for the effectiveness of the Tranquility Room, saying she recently "hit a wall" after a long day juggling her three primary jobs at BAMC. After 20 minutes in the space, she was able to concentrate and work three more hours.

Now she's hoping to use the room as a lab. If she gets the grant she's applied for, she'll study specific effects of the space and the equipment. For now, though, she wants staffers to use the space:

"If you help the staff, you help the patients."



PHOTOS BY JERRY LARA/glara@express-news.net

Col. Lee Cancio, a physician at Brooke Army Medical Center, tries out the Tranquility Room.

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