

AC-2005 About the Cover

Tables: 0

Figures: (1 cover image)

BJ Adams (19##-) *With Apologies to Arcimbaldo, Flower petals on radiation mask, 2009.*

TOC title: Courage Unmasked

Running head: About the Cover

Keywords: head and neck cancer, oropharyngeal cancer, human papillomavirus, HPV, radiation mask, flower mask, about the cover, BJ Adams, emerging infectious diseases, art and medicine,

Word count = 352

Suggested citation for this article: Bloom, S. Courage Unmasked. Emerg Infect Dis [Internet]. 2014 May [date cited]. <http://dx.doi.org/XX.XXX.....AC2014?>



Courage Unmasked

Sharon Bloom

Author affiliations: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, USA (S. Bloom);

Lying supine, the technician uses my mask to bolt me to the treatment table.
After he leaves the room, I feel alone, and at first, afraid.
I see and hear the radiation machine move around me, but feel nothing.
Minutes later, the door opens, and the mask is unbolted.
This process is repeated almost daily for 2 months.
After several weeks, the skin on my neck especially and the inside of my mouth and
throat become red, sore, and dry.
My sense of taste changes, it is difficult to eat.
By the end, the technician has become my trusted friend.
I can not predict the future, but I feel less afraid, my
Courage Unmasked. (Cookie Kerxton, personal communication, 2014)

Radiation treatment for head and neck cancer involves the use of custom-molded plastic mesh masks placed over the head and shoulders to immobilize patients and facilitate the stereotactic positioning of radiation beams. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWm40P6eIM> .) This month's cover art was selected from the "Courage Unmasked" project that was founded by Cookie Kerxton, laryngeal cancer survivor and artist, who during one such treatment session envisioned the use of art to both raise awareness and raise support for fellow patients. After artists transform the discarded masks into works of art, the masks are exhibited and auctioned off. Proceeds support the non-profit Help for Head and Neck Cancer Fund, which grants small subsidies to persons with head and neck cancer in financial need.

Fiber artist BJ Adams was one of over 100 artists invited to sculpt used radiation masks with materials of their choice. Inspired by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-1593), who created portrait heads made from objects such as flowers, vegetables, and fruit, Adams chose brightly colored artificial flowers and insects, to create a spring-like mask to symbolize rebirth and rejuvenation.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is found in the majority of oropharyngeal cancers (OPC), a subtype of head and neck cancers. New data from the US show that the association of HPV with OPC is more common than previously thought. It is thus conceivable that HPV vaccines developed to prevent cervical cancer might also prevent some oropharyngeal cancers.

Acknowledgements: More mask creations can be found at <http://courageunmasked.org/>. Additional artwork by BJ Adams can be found at www.BJAdamsArt.com. I thank the University Health Network in Toronto for use of their instructional video. I thank Marian McDonald for feedback on earlier drafts.

Bibliography

1. Steinau M., Saraiya, M., Goodman, M., Peters, E., Watson, M., Cleveland, J., et al, Human Papillomavirus Prevalence in Oropharyngeal Cancers prior to Vaccine Introduction in the United States. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 2014;20:zzz-zzz.</jrn>