



## Horticultural therapy harvests healing and wellness in recovery at Carrier Clinic

Laura DePrado, Community Contributor Published 7:13 a.m. ET Oct. 16, 2018



**Carrier Clinic in Belle Mead has deployed a mobile cart therapeutic gardening program fresh with seasonal plants to engage the five senses of sight, sounds, taste, touch and smell.** (Photo: ~Courtesy of Carrier Clinic)

People have long realized that plants and gardens, and the very acts of gardening and growing produce countless healthful benefits for human beings.

Carrier Clinic, located in Montgomery, has operated on that premise since its founding. The campus is rooted as a working on-site farm, where the therapeutic role of being “hands-on” with nature has been sown into its team-method approaches to better behavioral health.

To complement this ongoing work, a new horticultural therapy initiative was launched this spring as part of Carrier’s commitment to its treatment program.

Carrier Clinic is a private, nonprofit behavioral health system specializing in psychiatric and addiction treatment; it recently announced that it is joining Hackensack Meridian Health. Carrier’s system includes an inpatient psychiatric hospital, detoxification and rehabilitation center, adolescent residential facility, and a fully accredited middle and high school for students classified emotionally disturbed. It was established in 1910 as the Belle Mead Barn Colony and Sanatorium by Dr. John Kindred for “the treatment of nervous and mental disorders and also all allied disease.” The

first charter of 1910 was to produce, purchase sell, and deal in milk, butter, eggs and other food, farm and dairy products.”

Both agriculture and horticultural therapy have come a long way since Dr. Kindred’s day.



Carrier Clinic in Belle Mead has deployed a mobile cart therapeutic gardening program fresh with seasonal plants to engage the five senses of sight, sounds, taste, touch and smell. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Carrier Clinic)

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For the first phase of its new horticultural program, Carrier Clinic has deployed a mobile cart therapeutic gardening program fresh with seasonal plants to engage the five senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell, aiming to connect patients with activities that are purposeful and meaningful. I am facilitating the program with the goal of making it an essential part of Carrier’s treatment regimen. Year-round, we will be using products from New Jersey growers, Carrier Clinic courtyard plantings from several units, and my own gardens.

The evidence-based benefits of horticultural therapy are social, physical and psychological well-being.

“We are fortunate to be a part of horticultural therapy,” said Jacqueline Bienenstock, Director of Acute Care Unit serving teens and adults ages 16 to 65. “It is our culture on this unit to promote healing and wellness through a variety of treatment modalities such as art, music, yoga, grief, and aromatherapy for examples. Patients are able to express themselves through the creative arts groups. Horticultural therapy has a positive impact on the care provided and contributes to the achievement of good vocational and educational outcomes.”

Carrier's Adult Care Unit is the latest unit to benefit from horticultural therapy. The Older Adult, Adult Psychiatric Addiction, and Adolescent unit also have horticultural therapy components.

Bienenstock, a 29-year clinician at Carrier Clinic noted, "It is very important to me to decrease the stigma of mental health. Horticultural therapy as part of our creative arts promotes patient-centered support and offers physical, mental, social and spiritual services." Group Horticultural Therapy varies in size from 10 to 15 patients. "Patients who normally do not attend groups always attend the horticultural therapy group," Bienenstock said.

Examples of horticultural therapy activities include many culinary projects using herbs and flowers for infused teas (hot and cold), herb mixes with and without olive oil, as seasoning for salads, meats, pasta, desserts, harvesting and drying herbs for sachets, aromatherapy, flower arranging, planting, harvesting and storing seeds.

Nature offers an endless supply of material and I encourage the connection to plants through the five senses, to help patients manage problems and cope through the seasons. At the same time with guidance I encourage success on some level, and opportunity to inspire a meaningful connection in rehabilitation and habilitation, for vocational, social and therapeutic outcomes.

*Laura DePrado is a registered horticultural therapist, and president of Final Touch Landscaping, LLC.*