Guided Imagery in Cardiac Surgery

In 1998, a research team led by Linda Halpin at the Inova Heart Center of Inova Fairfax Hospital compared cardiac surgical outcomes between two groups of heart patients - with and without guided imagery. A questionnaire was developed to assess the benefits of the guided imagery program to those who elected to participate in it, and, in addition, data from the hospital financial cost-accounting database were collected and matched to the two groups of patients.

Analysis of the data revealed that patients who completed the guided imagery program had a shorter average length of stay, a decrease in average direct pharmacy costs, and a decrease in average direct pain medication costs while maintaining high overall patient satisfaction with the care and treatment provided.

Guided imagery is now used as a standard, complementary therapy to help reduce anxiety, pain, and length of stay among the cardiac surgery patients at Inova Fairfax.