Recovering from surgery back in her room, the patient suffered from nausea. And as anyone who has ever coped with a churning stomach can tell you, nausea is not fun... overwhelming nearly every sense.

To help the patient feel better, a nurse offered her a warm, lavender-infused washcloth. The patient was skeptical, but after discussion, agreed to try it. As her nausea lifted, the patient's caution turned to delight! She was truly surprised that it was her sense of smell that was the pathway to relief.

Welcome to aromatherapy, a complementary therapy that uses essential oils to provide relaxation, induce sleep, reduce anxiety, and soothe nausea. Aromatherapy is new and unique to North Valley Hospital in Whitefish, and after only a few weeks, clinicians are pleased with the results. It joins other complementary therapies that are key components of NVH's Planetree philosophy of patient-centered care such as certified pet therapy visits, massage, live music and acupuncture. According to Loni Conley, RN, Director of NVH's Medical/Surgical Inpatient Department, aromatherapy is adjunct to the medications that would be offered by doctors. Loni emphasizes that the oils are only for inhalation, and are not placed in contact with skin.

The effects of aromatherapy may occur at a psychological, physiological or cellular level. The therapy is highly regulated and is administered by nurses only after clinical evaluation and discussion with the patient. Loni said that consent, treatment, and outcomes are carefully documented for each patient for each administration of therapy with essential oils.

Also regulated are the types of oils used. What aromatherapy is not is sniffing your favorite department store perfume! Known as "essential oils", the materials used are natural, non-synthetic, and are derived from plants. Ingredients must meet stringent chemical standards and their storage and methods of application are the subject of hospital policies and regulation.

Different oils provide different effects, and these outcomes can differ with each person.

- Frankincense and bergamot for physical, emotional or spiritual comfort
- Lavender and lemon to calm patients and ease anxiety
- Peppermint and ginger help soothe nausea
- Roman chamomile and wild orange to aid in relaxation and promote sleep

Additionally, aromatherapy oils can be gently diffused in public areas to improve the sensory well-being of spaces that may reflect the clinical nature of the activities that take place in a hospital.

Florence Nightingale believed in creating the best environment to enable natural healing. Loni agrees, and has long been interested in holistic nursing and encouraging a "healing environment - a happy space with relaxation enabling patients to be on the road to wellness and health." We think Florence Nightingale would approve!