

Pain Management: Music therapy **Ms Iris Hoiting, Project Officer**

“Music is as powerful as any medicine” – Oliver Sacks

The effects of music

To many people, music is an important part of their lives. One of the main reasons for the appeal of music is the positive effect that music can have on our well-being. This link between music and a patient’s well-being has been studied extensively, and dates as far back as 1914. In that year, Dr. Evan Kane witnessed the positive effects of playing music from a phonograph on anxiety levels of patients in a surgery room. From that point forward, research has consistently demonstrated that music can indeed provide a number of



image: <http://seniormusictherapy.net>

beneficial effects, increasing positive emotions, reducing fatigue, and increasing general psychological well-being (e.g. Croom, 2015; Tsai et al., 2014). A recent study of 500 older adults aged 65-75 in Sweden, for example, demonstrated that listening to music produced positive emotions and psychological well-being among participants (Laukka, 2007)—factors which are, in turn, associated with positive health outcomes (Boehm & Kubzansky, 2012). Music can also serve as a distraction from physical pain, triggering positive emotional responses that may increase pain tolerance (for an extensive overview of the effects of music therapy on pain, please see Gutschell, et al., 2013; Hilliard, 2005).

Using music therapy to manage pain in end-of-life care

We have seen a surge in the use of music therapy in palliative care settings as an intervention to manage pain and increase a patient’s quality of life. Although more evidence-based research is required to improve our understanding of the effects of music therapy for end-of-life care patients specifically, McConnell, et al. (2016) conclude in their literature review that music therapy may indeed be effective for reducing pain at the end of life. For example, it has been suggested that music may promote relaxation and decrease the perception, length, and intensity of pain experienced at the end of life. Music can also facilitate communication between family members and the patient (for example encouraging discussions about spirituality), which could reinforce the experience of social and spiritual support of the patient—which, in turn, has been proven effective in alleviating pain as well (Burns et al., 2015; Gélinas et al., 2012).

Examples of music therapy in end-of-life care

Music therapy, defined as a “controlled method for listening to music, making use of its physiological, psychological, and emotional impact on the individual during treatment for an illness or trauma” (Biley, 1992), not only encompasses listening to music, but it can also include writing and singing songs, playing instruments, moving to music, music focused relaxation or discussing the lyrics of meaningful songs. The following exercise, for example, encourages a patient to focus on the ‘soundtrack’ of their life, by discussing what songs have been, and are, meaningful to them, and which memories are associated with those songs. Older people have indicated that music can trigger feelings of nostalgia and encourage reflection on meaningful memories of their past (Juslin & Laukka, 2004), so an exercise like this might be very relevant for older patients.

Your Personal Soundtrack

| Age | The music you listened to | Associated memories |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Birth to grade school</i> | | |
| <i>Grade school</i> | | |
| <i>Adolescence</i> | | |
| <i>Adulthood</i> | | |
| <i>Later life</i> | | |

Image adapted from: <http://lifeanddeathmatters.ca/music-therapy-in-hospice-palliative-care/>

Since listening to music is an example of music therapy that is easy to administer, this can be a great option for older and/or ill people that have trouble communicating, or who are too ill to participate in an activity such as the one described above. That listening to music can be a meaningful and powerful tool for patients can be witnessed in [this video](#) (uploaded by the LA times), showing Jared Axen, or rather, *The Singing Nurse*, singing for his patients.

For more information on music therapy in palliative care, please see [this informative document](#), posted by the Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care (U.S).

For more information on music therapy in Hong Kong, see the following websites:

- Music therapy in Hong Kong for elderly, chronically ill, palliative care patients and carers, is offered at the [Hong Kong Music Therapy Centre](#)
- Please click [here](#) for a list of music therapists associated with the Hong Kong Music Therapy Association

References:

- Biley F. (1992). Use of music in therapeutic care. *British Journal of Nursing*, 1, 178–179
- Boehm, J.K., & Kubzansky, L.D. (2012). The heart's content: the association between positive psychological well-being and cardiovascular health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 655-691.
- Burns, D. S., Perkins, S. M., Tong, Y., Hilliard, R. E., & Cripe, L. D. (2015). Music therapy is associated with family perception of more spiritual support and decreased breathing problems in cancer patients receiving hospice care. *Journal of pain and symptom management*, 50(2), 225-231.
- Croom, A. M. (2015). Music practice and participation for psychological well-being: A review of how music influences positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. *Musicae Scientiae*, 19(1), 44-64.
- Gélinas, C., Arbour, C., Michaud, C., Robar, L. & Côté, J. (2012). Patients and ICU nurses' perspectives of non-pharmacological interventions for pain management. *Nursing in Critical Care*, 18(6), 307-318.
- Gutgsell, K.J., Schluchter, M., Margevicius, S., Degolia, P.A., Mclaughlin, B., ... & Wiencek, C. (2013). Music therapy reduces pain in palliative care patients: a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 45(5), 822-831.
- Hilliard, R. E. (2005). Music therapy in hospice and palliative care: a review of the empirical data. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2(2), 173-178.
- Juslin, P.N. & Laukka, P. (2004). Expression, perception, and induction of musical emotions: A review and a questionnaire study of everyday listening. *Journal of New Music Research*, 33, 217-238.
- Kane, E. (1914). The phonograph in the operating room. *JAMA*, 62, 1829-1830
- Laukka, P. (2007). Uses of music and psychological well-being among the elderly. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8(2), 215-241.
- McConnell, T., Scott, D., & Porter, S. (2016). Music therapy for end-of-life care: an updated systematic review. *Palliative Medicine*, doi: 10.1177/0269216316635387
- Tsai, H. F., Chen, Y. R., Chung, M. H., Liao, Y. M., Chi, M. J., Chang, C. C., & Chou, K. R. (2014). Effectiveness of music intervention in ameliorating cancer patients' anxiety, depression, pain, and fatigue: a meta-analysis. *Cancer nursing*, 37(6), E35-E50.