

palliative care patients benefit from unique music therapy project, study finds

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As people face a terminal illness and are confined to a hospital bed or hospice room, music can provide a great source of solace. North American healthcare professionals have increasingly recognized the benefits of music therapy in palliative care, since end-of-life treatment is designed to meet the psychosocial, physical and spiritual needs of patients.

Sandi Curtis, a [music therapy](#) professor in the Concordia University Department of Creative Arts Therapies, has published a new study on the topic in the journal *Music and Medicine*. Her findings are based on a unique collaboration she orchestrated between university music therapy students, musicians from a professional symphony orchestra and a hospital palliative care ward.

"This project combined the talents and interests of violinists, violists and cellists with those of advanced student music therapists," she explains, noting her project has since been reprised in two Australian pediatric wards. "Our study showed how music therapy was effective in enhancing pain relief, comfort, relaxation, mood, confidence, resilience, life quality and well-being in patients."

Curtis, who is vice-president elect of the American Music Therapy Association, says her investigation benefitted everyone who took part. "Student music therapists had an invaluable opportunity to make music with professional-calibre musicians," she says. "Symphony musicians had an opportunity to experience the transformative powers of music in

a nonperformance setting and [palliative care patients](#) had access to music therapy services."

As part of the study, which spanned three years, Curtis divided undergraduates and musicians into pairs supervised by an accredited music therapist. As for the 371 participants, they were male and female palliative care patients between 18 and 101 years old. All patients had a terminal illness and most with a diagnosis of cancer.

Participants were seen for a single music therapy session, which lasted from 15 to 60 minutes. Interventions were designed to address four areas – pain relief, relaxation, mood and quality of life. Three [palliative care](#) patients were so comforted by the experience that their families requested music therapy teams return to play soft music as they died. "On two other occasions, because of the strong relationship established in prior music therapy sessions, the music therapy team was asked to perform at the patients' funerals," Curtis notes.

Curtis is currently studying how music therapy can help women and children who are survivors of violence.

More information: mmd.sagepub.com/content/3/1/20.abstract

Provided by Concordia University

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