

From birdsong to heavy metal: How cancer patients use music to work through their feelings

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Very few treatments or therapies endured by cancer patients can be described as pleasant, but a study published in *Arts & Health* shows the positive impact of using music as a personal coping method when faced with the disease.

Swedish Professor Fereshteh Ahmadi conducted face-to-face interviews with 17 cancer patients aged 24 to 73. All had listened to or played [music](#) as a means of coping with their illness and shared their thoughts and feelings in great detail during the study.

What Ahmadi found is that although all forms of music seemed to help the patients, different styles of music helped in different ways. Listening to cheerful music, for instance, helped patients mask some of the psychological effects of dealing with cancer, especially depression, and created a happy, imaginary world for them to inhabit. In the same way, heavy-metal music gave some younger sufferers an outlet for their anger, as well as created a new, empowered, destructive persona for them. Religious music seemed to strengthen the faith of some sufferers, helping them view their illness in a new light. Birdsong and other forms of natural music helped patients feel part of something bigger than themselves, and boosted them with the 'spiritual sanctification of nature'.

Summarising her findings, Ahmadi concludes that: 'Given the important role music has played in coping with cancer in the present cases, it is

essential that cancer therapists and caregivers turn more of their attention to music...The significant role of art, especially music in health-related issues, must be recognized and more studies conducted in the research area of art and health.'

Rich with patients' own personal insights and experience, Ahmadi's study is an essential contribution to understanding the huge spectrum of raw emotion experienced by [cancer](#) patients during treatment, and developing a strategies for helping people cope day to day with the pressures of their illness.

More information: *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, Volume 5, Issue 2, 2013 [DOI: 10.1080/17533015.2013.780087](#)

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