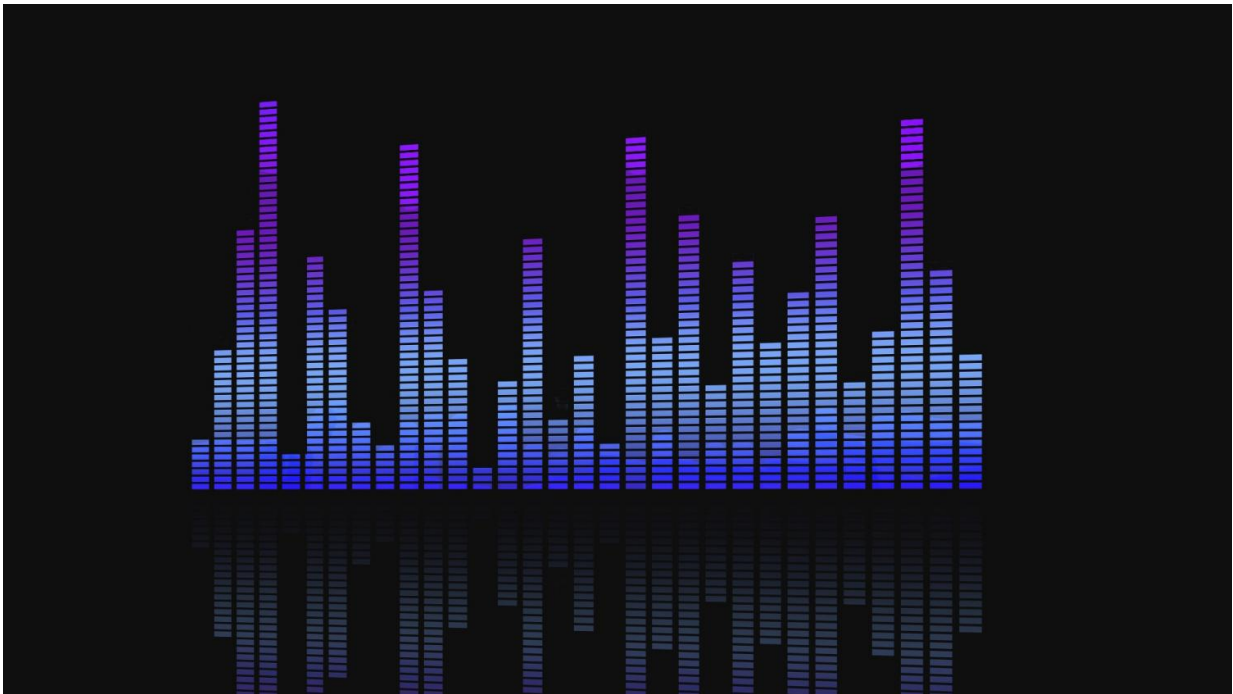


Study finds music therapy brings effective pain relief for sickle cell patients

June 14 2018



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A new study published in the *Journal of Music Therapy* reveals promising findings for the application of improvisational music therapy in assuaging the multidimensional acute pain of adult patients with sickle cell disease (SCD). This study, conducted by University Hospitals Connor Integrative Health Network's music therapist Samuel Rodgers-Melnick, MT-BC, investigated the feasibility and preliminary efficacy of

a single-session electronic music improvisation to diminish pain intensity and improve pain relief and mood in adults with SCD.

"Sickle cell [pain](#) is complex, affecting [patients](#) physically, emotionally, and socially," said Jane Little, MD, Director of the Adult SCD Clinic at UH Seidman Cancer Center. "Our results support the value that music therapists contribute to our patients' overall pain management and experience of care, just as they reinforce patient education and coping strategies. We find that patients typically respond better to a varied strategy, rather than medications alone.

"We are very enthusiastic about music therapy, and its promise for improving the lives of people who have [sickle cell disease](#)."

In the randomized controlled trial, patients with SCD being treated in UH Seidman Cancer Center's Acute Care Clinic were assigned to one of three 20-minute conditions: a session with a music therapist, an iPod to listen to pre-selected music themselves, or no music at all. While passively listening to music improved mood, music therapy had a significantly stronger impact on aiding in pain management for patients actively engaged with a music therapist. Rodgers-Melnick created the music therapy interventions in patients' preferred genres: rhythm and blues, gospel, soul, hip-hop and jazz.

"When you are socially and cognitively engaged in music therapy, it has a greater effect on your mood and the way you experience pain," said Rodgers-Melnick. "Music almost works like pain medication when people are engaged in the experience."

In this inherited anemia that renders the red blood cells stickier and more fragile, sickle cell patients experience bouts of sudden, severe pain compounding chronic pain. Rodgers-Melnick compares it to a traffic jam in the body, spiking unpredictable and intense pain. Dr. Little

indicated that this disease can result in significant damage to organs, blood vessels and nerves over time.

"We want to use music [therapy](#) to improve [pain management](#) across the board, not just to manage acute crises," said Rodgers-Melnick. "There are many possibilities for this approach."

In a previous study, Rodgers-Melnick developed the BEATS (Build/Educate/Advance/Transition in SCD) program to provide educational tools through [music](#) to empower sickle cell patients. UH Seidman Cancer Center established a Bridge Clinic, complete with lively BEATS [music therapy](#) session, to guide SCD patients from adolescence to adulthood.

More information: Samuel N Rodgers-Melnick et al, The Effects of a Single Electronic Music Improvisation Session on the Pain of Adults with Sickle Cell Disease: A Mixed Methods Pilot Study, *Journal of Music Therapy* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/jmt/thy004](https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/thy004)

Provided by University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center

Citation: Study finds music therapy brings effective pain relief for sickle cell patients (2018, June 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-music-therapy-effective-pain-relief.html>

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