

# Live personalized music soothes stressed patients during lockdown

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A violinist playing a soothing melody tailored to a patient's particular medical condition and personal musical preferences in the hospital can provide "psychological first aid," reports a new Northwestern Medicine study about neurological patients who received tele-music therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

At a time when patients in the neuroscience unit were isolated from loved ones, a musical intervention improved patients' emotional states, reduced their stress and anxiety and provided a pleasurable experience, the study showed.

"Music interventions, and in this case tele-music, can affect the emotional well-being of patients, their [family members](#), the health care team and improve [patient care](#)," said lead study author Dr. Borna Bonakdarpour, a professor of neurology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and a Northwestern Medicine neurologist.

The study will be published in *Frontiers in Neurology* Dec. 13.

"The impact of the findings can apply to patients beyond the neurosciences unit to include other specialties and other hospitals," Bonakdarpour said. "Music as a clinical tool is underutilized in outpatient settings and in hospitals."

Patients said they felt emotionally supported. Music awakened their speech and prompted them to dance in their hospital beds despite their neurologic disability for which they were admitted. The esthetic experience, which is not commonly associated with hospital stays, empowered the patients and their families and eased medical procedures, because patients were less anxious and more cooperative. Emotionally distressed patients often seek more care from nurses, and, per nurses' accounts, patients who received the musical intervention were more content with their stay.

Participants in the study were offered a 30-minute live music session over FaceTime by a clinically trained violist in consultation with a music therapist and a certified music practitioner. Music used for the interventions was personalized for the patient. Participants were evaluated with the Music Assessment Tool where they indicated their

musical preferences and music to which they objected. Following the intervention, participants answered a questionnaire assessing how music impacted their emotional state based on a scale of 1 to 10. Scores were then averaged across all patients and were calculated as percentages.

Eighty-seven sessions were completed during a three-month period. Despite different degrees of disability, most patients had a significantly positive response to the music session. They agreed the [intervention](#) improved their [emotional state](#) (92%); that it provided a pleasurable experience (92.4%); and that it reduced their stress and anxiety (89.5%).

"Our study stresses the importance of demographically and clinically informed music and art interventions for patients as an essential part of their care," Bonakdarpour said.

This pilot project serves as a prelude to further study how music interventions can support admitted neurology patients. Northwestern scientists are in the process of investigating the effect of [music](#) in patients with epilepsy and dementia using specific physiological measurements (heart rate, functional MRI, brain wave tests).

**More information:** Neurology Telemusic Program At the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Turning Hospital Time into Aesthetic Time During Crisis, *Frontiers in Neurology* (2021).

Provided by Northwestern University

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