

Music Therapy in Palliative Care

Compiled by Carolyn Hart, RMT

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Music therapy, when provided by a qualified music therapist, has an important role to play in improving quality of life and addressing symptomatic issues during palliative care. Music therapists typically use singing, song writing, improvisation, listening to music, and music-based counselling to meet a range of needs in palliative care including:

- Physical symptoms such as nausea, pain, fatigue & shortness of breath
- Emotional issues such as depression, anxiety, anger & fear
- Spiritual connection & spiritually-based rituals
- Social isolation, loneliness & boredom
- Relationships with family and friends
- Leaving musical legacies such as songs, performances and music-based life reviews



What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is the planned and creative use of musical experience to achieve therapeutic outcomes.

Music therapy is a registered allied health profession and music therapists are required to complete accredited tertiary training and maintain registration with the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA).

People of all ages may benefit from music therapy and no musical training is required.

How to find a Registered Music Therapist

- Visit the Australian Music Therapy Assoc (AMTA) website www.austmta.org.au then choose "Contact Us" and "Find a Music Therapist" from the menus
- Contact the SA branch of AMTA by email amta.sa1@gmail.com or phone enquiries 8303 1329.

Carolyn Hart is a Registered Music Therapist working at Flinders Medical Centre as part of the Arts in Health at FMC program. Carolyn currently offers music therapy to patients who are recovering from stroke, who have dementia-related behaviour issues, and families in the neonatal unit. To find out more about music therapy, visit the Australian Music Therapy Assoc website: www.austmta.org.au.

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Using music to care for self and others

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This is an excerpt of information provided at a workshop presentation for the "Searching for Balance" Palliative Care Volunteers Conference 2010.

Key Ideas

- ♪ Music is a 'whole of person' experience— physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual
- ♪ The experience of music is highly individual... you cannot write a musical prescription
- ♪ People will often know intuitively what type of music will suit them at a given time

Using music to care for others

- ♪ Music is one of the earliest skills to develop and one of the hardest to destroy
- ♪ People can sometimes sing when they can no longer speak, or at least engage in the music in some way
- ♪ Music can distract from physical symptoms, provide relief from difficult tasks, and triggers brain chemistry that helps us to feel good
- ♪ Music that is very familiar to someone is likely to be the most useful
- ♪ Positive responses to watch for:
 - ♪ Smiling or crying
 - ♪ Singing or humming
 - ♪ Tapping toes or fingers
 - ♪ Attention focused on the music
- ♪ Whenever possible help people to make their own musical choices

Everyday uses of music

- ♪ Distraction
- ♪ Relaxation
- ♪ Nurturing
- ♪ Enjoyment
- ♪ Remembering
- ♪ Creative expression
- ♪ Social connections

Relaxing music qualities

- ♪ Slow, steady tempo
- ♪ Music is predictable with only subtle changes
- ♪ Often contains string or woodwind instruments
- ♪ It has a calming effect

Listening mindfully

Sit quietly with your body relaxed; Listen & notice; Do not judge.

Notice the music, the speed, the high and the low notes, what takes your attention?

Notice your body's reactions; Do you feel the music in your body? Where? How does it feel? Don't judge, just notice & really listen.



Community choirs offer one of the more nurturing, enjoyable and easily accessible ways to care for yourself.

To find a community choir, contact your local council.