



Music Therapy in Hospice and Palliative Care

What is Music Therapy?

Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapy interventions can be designed to manage stress, alleviate pain, enhance memory, improve communication, enhance quality of life, and provide unique opportunities for interaction. Because music therapy is a powerful and non-threatening medium, unique outcomes are possible.

How Does Music Therapy Make A Difference For the Terminally Ill?

When we are working with persons for whom a medical cure is no longer possible, music therapy can improve the quality of life by addressing the emotional, spiritual, psychosocial, and physical needs that may arise during this time. For terminally ill persons, music therapy can serve as a catalyst to establish both verbal and non-verbal communication. The skilled use of music can facilitate emotional self-expression and provide a supportive and non-threatening environment with opportunities to confront fears and discuss present concerns. Musical associations can facilitate life review and assist in resolving significant personal issues.

Music therapy can help to lessen feelings of isolation and loneliness by providing opportunities for social interaction and the sharing of personal experiences with others. The use of religious music can provide spiritual comfort, and reassurance and support the individual's faith. Music therapy can also be used to help family members throughout the grieving process by providing comfort, continuity and opportunities to express feelings of loss.

Carefully selected music can facilitate relaxation and alleviate anxiety, agitation and insomnia, or it can provide motivation for physical activation and enhance feelings of well-being. Music therapy can also assist the individual in maintaining a sense of independence and in retaining a sense of control of his or her life by providing opportunities for choice and decision-making. Music has been found to have a significant impact on reducing the perception of physical pain and the length and severity of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.

What Does a Music Therapist Do?

After assessing the strengths and needs of each client, a qualified music therapist develops a treatment plan with goals and objectives and then provides the indicated treatment. Music therapists structure the use of both instrumental and vocal music strategies to restore, maintain, or improve functioning or facilitate changes that contribute to life quality. Music therapists are usually members of a hospice/palliative care interdisciplinary team and they implement programs with groups or individuals on a vast continuum of needs.



What Can One Expect From A Music Therapist?

When individualized music experiences are designed by a professionally-trained music therapist to fit end-of-life needs, responses may be immediate and readily apparent. Participants without a music background can benefit from music therapy.

Music therapy provides opportunities for:

- Aiding in the process of life review
- Help to initiate communication with family members, serving as a source of comfort throughout the grieving process
- Positive changes in mood and emotional states
- Sense of control over life through successful experiences
- Reality Orientation/thought organization
- Awareness of self and environment which accompanies increased attention to music
- Anxiety and stress reduction for terminally ill and family
- Nonpharmacological management of pain and discomfort
- Stimulation which provokes interest even when no other approach is effective
- Reinforcing identity and self-concept, and decrease feelings of isolation
- Encouraging participation in physical activity and exercise to promote feelings of vitality and well-being
- Emotional intimacy when families share creative music experiences
- Social interaction with caregivers and families
- Personal and creative expression
- For Alzheimer's patients, memory recall which contributes to reminiscence and satisfaction with life

Why Music Therapy?

The wife of a man with severe dementia said, "When I was encouraged by a music therapist to sing to my husband who had been lost in the fog of Alzheimer's disease for so many years, he looked at me and seemed to recognize me. On the last day of his life, he opened his eyes and looked into mine when I sang his favorite hymn. I'll always treasure that last moment we shared together. Music therapy gave me that memory, the gift I will never forget."

Barbara Crowe (past president of the National Association for Music Therapy) said:
"(Music therapy) can make the difference between withdrawal and awareness, between isolation and interaction, between chronic pain and comfort -- between demoralization and dignity."

About Peak View Music Therapy

Peak View Music Therapy is committed to providing high-quality, goal centered music therapy services to restore, maintain, and improve the health of children, adults, and seniors in Colorado. Peak View Music Therapy provides individual and group sessions in the community, homes, schools, skilled-nursing facilities, assisted-living facilities, hospices, and other various locations.