

Information on music therapy



This evidence based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about the services that we offer. You may tell us how useful you have found this using the feedback forms provided.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care Opinion

We support this therapy and include it as part of the Bristol Approach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	We support this therapy, but do not offer it as part of the Bristol Approach <input type="checkbox"/>	We do not support this therapy <input type="checkbox"/>
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In brief

Music therapy generally involves playing with a music therapist using a range of highly accessible tuned and un-tuned percussion instruments or listening to music in a relaxed state. Music therapy is offered by professionally trained therapists who are able to tailor the session to whatever the client or group of clients require. No existing musical ability is necessary to benefit from music therapy. Recent research has demonstrated that this therapy can support emotional, physical, cognitive and psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, specific to people with cancer, research has shown that music therapy is beneficial for relieving pain, nausea, anxiety associated with cancer treatments and also improves quality of life and mood. Overall, music therapy is considered safe and beneficial for people with cancer.

Practitioner Perspective (Professor Leslie Bunt)

"Music therapists working within the cancer care setting address a range of needs relating to physical symptoms and psychological concerns arising from the disease process, as well as from chemotherapy medications and radiation treatments. Music therapists also seek to address patients' spiritual and communal needs.

Music making provides a portal to the world of the imagination and provides opportunities for a wide range of emotions to be expressed. It is a very direct medium for accessing the world of the emotions. There is often a great feeling of joy and sense of freedom expressed as well as temporary relief from being overwhelmed from some of the more difficult emotions. While the music lasts participants often report that they are able to move beyond present preoccupations and even any pain. The music can range from expressing chaotic and angry feelings through to a sense of peace and transcendence."

More information: What is music therapy?

Music therapy has been defined as 'the use of sounds and music within an evolving relationship between client/patient and therapist to support and develop physical, mental, social, emotional, social and spiritual well-being'¹. It is often used to help people express themselves emotionally, relieve symptoms and to reduce or distract from pain, nausea, anxiety, insomnia or depression.

Music plays an important role in all human cultures and was recognised as a healing tool for body and soul by the ancient Greek civilization. Modern music therapy has its roots in the early twentieth century with musicians visiting war veterans in UK hospitals to help those recovering from shellshock in World War I. In the UK music therapy underwent substantial development in the late 1960's and 1970's. This gave rise to professional training courses for therapists who now work in a wide variety of settings (e.g. nursing homes, schools, prisons, hospices and outpatient clinics) and with a wide variety of clients including children and adults of all ages. Music therapy may also be practiced at the end of someone's life to ease their passing away. In the US this approach is called music thanatology.

Music therapy may take place as an individual one-to-one therapist-client interaction or alternatively as a group activity. There are several activities a therapist may use either with groups or with individuals. These include: improvising music with simple instruments, writing lyrics and songs, receptive listening to music and guided imagery with music.

What happens in a music therapy session?

Each music therapy session is unique as therapists respond to the needs of clients, taking into account such things as musical tastes and cultural background. No previous musical abilities are needed or expected. Group sessions usually involve free improvisation; a wide variety of musical instruments are provided for the spontaneous creation of music using different rhythms or simple melody patterns. Improvisation allows people to be creatively expressive and to be in touch with and release energy or emotions which may be difficult to express verbally. All music therapists are professional musicians who have undergone further training in music therapy and psychotherapeutic techniques.

Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is a specialised branch of music therapy offered by therapists who have undergone additional training. GIM involves listening to specially created programmes of music in a deeply relaxed state. Through listening to the music and the instructions given by the therapist symbols, feelings, visual images, insights or memories are evoked, which are shared with the therapist. After listening to the music, the therapist helps the client to make connections between the "images" and the client's life, exploring their significance and potential meaning.

What are the providers' claims?

Providers recommend music therapy for a number of emotional, psychological and physical problems. It is not promoted as a cure for cancer, but is believed to help people with cancer by improving overall quality of life. During chemotherapy, it is offered to relieve side effects such as nausea, vomiting, anxiety and pain. It is also thought to lessen high blood pressure and relieve insomnia and depression.

Are there any legal issues?

All music therapists practising in the UK are now registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC). Only professionally trained music therapists are approved

post-graduate courses are legally able to practise music therapy. During training, therapists learn various treatment methods including those connected to psychoanalytic theory and humanistic and transpersonal approaches. For information about the HPC register of music therapists please see contact details at the end of the sheet.

In the UK the Association of Professional Music Therapist has a website and can provide further information (contact details below).

How much does it cost?

Music therapy is often offered within NHS hospitals. Therapists also offer sessions privately at a cost of between £30 and £45 depending on the experience of the therapist. Music therapy forms part of the five day retreat at Penny Brohn Cancer Care, and can also be accessed through Cancerpoint at a cost of £25 per hour, or at a donation rate where eligible.

What's the evidence?

This is a summary of our research findings. A full list of references used to write this section is available upon request.

Recent qualitative and quantitative research has demonstrated that music therapy offered by professionally qualified therapists can lead to improved quality of life and general wellbeing. It may promote emotional, social, cognitive, physical and spiritual wellbeing and help relieve the side effects of cancer treatments and cancer pain. A growing body of research evidence is finding positive support for music therapy and it is considered safe and therefore beneficial for people with cancer.

Is music therapy safe?

Music therapy is considered to be safe as long as 90 Decibels is not exceeded² and when carried out by a professionally trained music therapist. Unqualified therapists may conduct sessions which lead to ineffective outcomes, and even discomfort and stress.

Resources used

A full list of references used to write this sheet, including the research literature, is available upon request. Please call the helpline.

1. Bunt, L. & Hoskyns, S. (2002). The Handbook of Music Therapy. London: Hove: Brunnet-Routledge
2. The desktop guide to complementary and alternative medicine. Second Edition. Ernst E, Pittler M H, Wider B (Eds). 2006. Mosby, Elsevier

Other sources of information

Other organisations who offer information on complementary therapies:

- Foundation for Integrated Health. Web: <http://www.fih.org.uk>
- NHS National Library for Health. Web: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/cam>

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer:

- Cancer Research UK. Tel: 0207 009 8820, web: www.cancerresearchuk.org
- NHS Direct. Tel: 08 45 46 47, web: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- Cancerbackup. Tel: 0808 800 1234, web: www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Macmillan CancerLine. Tel: 0808 808 2020, web: www.macmillan.org.uk

National organisations that represent the therapy:

Association of Professional Music Therapists; Tel: 020 8440 4153 Web: www.apmt.org

Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

If you have any questions please contact us

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