



American Music Therapy Association, Inc.

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MUSIC THERAPY AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

"...[W]e lose sight of how powerful melody and rhythm can be in the realm of medicine, particularly with respect to Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers... nursing homes and hospitals are finding that working with a music therapist can make a big difference..."

- C. Gorman. Time, November 14, 2005

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 promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, enhance memory, improve communication, and provide unique opportunities for interaction. Research in music therapy supports the effectiveness of interventions in many areas such as facilitating movement and overall physical rehabilitation, increasing motivation to engage in treatment, providing emotional support for clients and their families, and creating an outlet for expression of feelings. Because music therapy is a powerful and non-threatening medium, unique outcomes are possible.

How Does Music Therapy Make A Difference For Older Persons?

Music therapy treatment is efficacious and valid with older persons who have functional deficits in physical, psychological, cognitive or social functioning. Research results and clinical experiences attest to the viability of music therapy even in those who are resistive to other treatment approaches. Music is a form of sensory stimulation, which provokes responses due to the familiarity, predictability, and feelings of security associated with it.

What Do Music Therapists Do?

After assessing the strengths and needs of each client, qualified music therapists develop a treatment plan with goals and objectives and then provide the indicated treatment. Music therapists structure the use of both instrumental and vocal music strategies to improve functioning or facilitate changes that contribute to life quality. They may improvise or compose music with clients, accompany and conduct group music experiences, provide instrument instruction, direct music and movement activities, or structure music listening opportunities. Music therapists are usually members of a health care interdisciplinary team and they implement programs with groups or individuals that display a vast continuum of needs, from leisure time classes and community involvement to bedside care.

Where Do Music Therapists Work?

Music therapists offer services in skilled and intermediate care facilities, adult foster care homes, rehabilitation hospitals, residential care facilities, hospitals, adult day care centers, retirement facilities, senior centers, hospices, senior evaluation programs, psychiatric treatment centers, and other facilities. Music therapists also work for agencies that provide in-home care. Some therapists are self-employed and provide individual and group music therapy services on a contract basis.

What Can One Expect From A Music Therapist?

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

Music therapy provides opportunities for:

- Memory recall which contributes to reminiscence and satisfaction with life
- Positive changes in mood and emotional states
- Sense of control over life through successful experiences
- Awareness of self and environment which accompanies increased attention to music
- Anxiety and stress reduction for older adult and caregiver
- Nonpharmacological management of pain and discomfort
- Stimulation which provokes interest even when no other approach is effective
- Structure which promotes rhythmic and continuous movement or vocal fluency as an adjunct to physical rehabilitation
- Emotional intimacy when spouses and families share creative music experiences
- Social interaction with caregivers and families

Who Is Qualified As A Music Therapist?

Graduates of colleges or universities from more than 70 approved music therapy programs are eligible to take a national examination administered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT), an independent, non-profit certifying agency fully accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. After successful completion of the CBMT examination, graduates are issued the credential necessary for professional practice, Music Therapist-Board Certified (MT-BC). In addition to the MT-BC credential, other recognized professional designations are Registered Music Therapists (RMT), Certified Music Therapists (CMT), and Advanced Certified Music Therapist (ACMT) listed with the National Music Therapy Registry. Any individual who does not have proper training and credentials is not qualified to provide music therapy services.

How Does Music Therapy Help Families?

Music therapy provides:

- A forum to share common experiences and enjoyment as a couple or family
- Meaningful time spent together in a positive, creative way
- Relaxation for the entire family
- Stimulation for reminiscence of family bonds
- Unity and intimacy for families through verbal and nonverbal interaction
- Respite for the caregiver

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.”

Dr. Oliver Sacks, at the Hearing before the Senate Special Committee on Aging entitled, “Forever Young: Music and Aging,” stated: “The power of music is very remarkable... One sees Parkinsonian patients unable to walk, but able to dance perfectly well or patients almost unable to talk, who are able to sing perfectly well... I think that music therapy and music therapists are crucial and indispensable in institutions for elderly people and among neurologically disabled patients.”

A gentleman in the early stages of progressive dementia improvised on a xylophone during a music therapy session to express his feelings, and then stated: “I don’t know how anyone can live without music.”

A frail 93 year old woman, referred for music therapy after being diagnosed with major depression, said: “Now, there is no need to be morose. I can have my music here with me and listen to it whenever I want to feel young.”

When a couple danced together for the first time after five years of the husband’s deterioration from probable Alzheimer’s disease, the wife said: “Thank you for helping us dance. It’s the first time in three years that my husband held me in his arms.” Tearfully, she said that she had missed him just holding her and that music therapy had made that possible.

What Is AMTA?

The American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) represents over 5,000 music therapists, corporate members, and related associations worldwide. AMTA’s roots date back to organizations founded in 1950 and 1971. Those two organizations merged in 1998 to ensure the progressive development of the therapeutic use of music in rehabilitation, special education, and medical and community settings. AMTA is committed to the advancement of education, training, professional standards, and research in support of the music therapy profession. The mission of the organization is to advance public knowledge of music therapy benefits and increase access to quality music therapy services. Currently, AMTA establishes criteria for the education and clinical training of music therapists. Members of AMTA adhere to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in their delivery of music therapy services.

How Can You Find A Music Therapist Or Get More Information?

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Is There Research To Support Music Therapy For Persons with Alzheimer's Disease?

Through peer-reviewed journals inside the profession such as the *Journal of Music Therapy*, *Music Therapy*, and *Music Therapy Perspectives*, and extensive articles in journals outside the profession, AMTA has promoted much research exploring the benefits of music therapy for persons with Alzheimer's Disease.

Research Highlights

- Music therapy reduces depression among older adults.
- Music experiences can be structured to enhance social/emotional skills, to assist in recall and language skills and to decrease problem behaviors.
- Music tasks can be used to assess cognitive ability in people with Alzheimer's Disease.
- Music is effective in decreasing the frequency of agitated and aggressive behaviors for individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias.
- Individuals in the late stages of dementia respond to and interact with music.

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