

Music Therapy

Throughout history, music has been used for its healing influences on health and behavior. In the 20th century, musicians were hired by hospitals during World War I and World War II to help wounded veterans. Music eased patient's suffering, as doctors noted soldiers responded positively to music both emotionally and physically.

Today, Certified Music Therapists work with clients in a variety of settings. These include: hospitals, rehabilitation and residential facilities, schools, correctional centers, mental health facilities and private practices.

Earlier this year, Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers introduced music therapy as part of its services. People in music therapy at Rainbow really benefit from the experience. For some, it can alter mood states and behavior, such as relaxing clients or assisting with depression or anger management. For others, it increases their attention span and helps with non-verbal communication.

What is music therapy?

According to the Certification Board for Music Therapists, music therapy is the specialized use of music by a credentialed professional who develops individualized treatment and supportive interventions for people of all ages and ability levels to address their social, communication, emotional, physical, cognitive, sensory and spiritual needs (2006).

In a therapeutic setting, music is used to improve a client's physical and mental functioning through structured, evidence-based interventions. Therapists set individualized goals where clients may create or improvise music, play along or simply listen to music.

It is not necessary to have musical ability to benefit from music therapy. The act of expressing one's self through music is a form of communication for clients who are non-verbal or for those who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally.

Processing music uses a different part of the brain than language, often allowing persons with brain injuries to sing words with less difficulty than speaking.

Music therapy and brain injury

Soshensky (2008) wrote: Negative affect states such as depression, boredom, loneliness and worthlessness have been reported to be the most common post-injury emotional reactions, and positive self-esteem has been identified as a



primary predictor of psychosocial readjustment. Music has been shown to increase dopamine levels (a catecholamine neurotransmitter, which acts within the brain to help regulate movement and emotion) that current neuropsychological theories associate with positive affect and feelings of well-being.

Research is uncovering the fact that music is a "whole brain" phenomenon (Soshensky, 2008). Music researcher, Daniel Levitan (2006), relates that music listening, performance and composition engage nearly every area of the brain that has so far been unidentified, and involves nearly every neural subsystem.

The following outlines specific examples in which music therapy benefits people with brain injuries (Wright, 2010):

- **Speech and language.** Though a client may not be able to talk, they may be able to sing. Singing also improves breath control and timing of speech, which are essential skills for verbal communication.
- **Memory/cognition.** Clients often struggle with memory loss and distraction. Music therapy helps with sequencing and concentration. Song writing is an excellent tool for building self-esteem and cognitive skills like idea generation and initiation.
- **Physical issues.** Playing musical instruments may help with stretching, regaining strength and limb movement, strengthening muscles as well as eye-hand coordination.

Music Therapy *continued*

- **Emotional issues.** Persons with a brain injury often experience anger and depression in the months following their injury. Listening to, or playing music allows patients to express emotions and communicate in a positive way.

What happens during a music therapy session?

Music therapy is tailored to each individual's needs and abilities. Some involved in music therapy may benefit from listening to music, while others may have the ability to hold instruments and play them.

Involvement in a music therapy session can come in a variety of ways (Formata Music Therapy):

- **Playing instruments** such as drums, piano or guitar encourages self-expression and promotes a socially acceptable release of tension and anger while helping to build social skills.
- **Listening to music** helps to increase attention span and improve memory. Listening to music can alter behavior and mood.
- **Movement** facilitated by the playing of instruments promotes the development of fine and gross motor skills. Clients can maintain muscle tone, improve balance and range of motion.
- **Singing** improves speech and language skills as well as breath control. It also aids in learning new concepts.
- **Improvising and composing** helps with discovery and validation of feelings and emotions. It promotes a positive method of communication.

A study conducted by Simon Gilbertson in 2006 investigated what clinical changes could be identified in music improvisation as part of early neurorehabilitation for people with severe traumatic brain injury and whether these changes could be linked to music intervention.

In his closing discussion, he states: Whereby many therapy strategies in neurorehabilitation focus on regaining functional ability, this study has shown that music therapy is not simply an additional therapy that can be added to this list. The application of music therapy can facilitate improvements in both functional and psychological aspects of life (Gilbertson, 2006). ❖

References:

(2006). *Music Therapy Credential is Registered*, Retrieved from: www.cbmt.org/default.asp?page=Media%20Releases

Formata Music Therapy. How Does Music Therapy Work?
Retrieved from:
<http://fermatamusictherapy.com/how-does-it-work>

Gilbertson, Simon. (2006). Music Therapy in Early Neurorehabilitation with People Who Have Experienced Traumatic Brain Injury. Music Therapy Today, Vol. VII (3), 662-693.

Retrieved from: <http://musictherapyworld.net>.

Soshensky, Rick. (2008). Releasing a CD of Original Client Music to the Public as an Aspect of Brain Injury Treatment: A Contemporary Music Therapy Perspective. Retrieved from: www.northwestcenter.com

Wright, Katherine. (2010). Music Therapy and Brain Injury. Retrieved from: www.mtabc.com/page.php?54

Written by Jonathan Carmona MT-BC, Music Therapist; Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, Inc. Copyright June 2010 – Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, Inc. For information, contact the editor at:

*RainbowVisions Magazine
Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, Inc.
38777 Six Mile Rd., Suite 101, Livonia, MI 48152, USA
E-mail: rainbowvisions@rainbowrehab.com*