

Collaborating With Music Therapists to Improve Patient Care



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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between perioperative nurses and music therapists can be beneficial in providing a safe, cost-effective means of managing patients' anxiety and pain and reducing the need for pharmacologic intervention in the perioperative setting. The use of a board-certified music therapist may help to improve patient outcomes, ease nurse workload, and serve as an adjunct therapeutic modality that is enjoyable for both patients and staff members. We conducted a two-year, randomized controlled trial to determine how to best implement a music therapy program, navigate its challenges, and collaborate with nurse colleagues to bring its benefits to surgical patients. This article offers suggestions for alliances between perioperative nursing and music therapy staff members and describes the potential of music therapists to help provide optimal patient care. *AORN J* 104 (September 2016) 192-197.

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Key words: *music therapy, music therapist, patient anxiety.*

Music is known to affect mood¹ and activity, including shopping,² driving,³ and sleep⁴ behaviors. Music is also used in hospitals, where it helps to relax patients, relieve anxiety, reduce pain, and improve surgeons' performance.^{5,6}

The patient awaiting surgery may experience intense anxiety as a result of the unfamiliar perioperative setting and may fear pain, anesthesia, and the surgical outcome.⁷ These patient concerns and anxieties can result in delayed or canceled procedures, increased pharmacologic interventions, and extended hospital stays.^{8,9} Music therapy may serve adult and pediatric patients before, during, and after their procedures through interventions (eg, listening, songwriting, associating music and imagery, singing, playing an instrument) that are based on the specific needs and preferences of the patient as determined via an assessment by a trained music therapist (ie, Music Therapist-Board Certified, MT-BC).^{10,11} Patients do

not need musical aptitude nor education to participate in a music therapy session because music therapists are able to create and tailor an experience to the individual needs and abilities of the patient. For instance, although a patient may not have songwriting or instrument-playing skills, a professional music therapist can fashion an experience in which such things are easily executed. During assessment in the preoperative area, music therapists may explore music preferences, discuss feelings, review the patient's medical history, and consider time restraints to create a treatment plan that best serves the specific needs of the patient in the time frame available. Goals may range from coping, communication, and expression to anxiety, pain, and stress management.

Research recognizes that the addition of music is a safe and cost-effective means of reducing anxiety during the surgical experience.¹² Music has been shown to reduce heart rate, blood pressure, and anxiety.¹³ Music may also help a surgical patient

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balance unfamiliarity and lack of control by offering preferred, familiar music, thus providing autonomy in a setting lacking much choice. In addition, perioperative music therapy may help mask adverse sound stimuli,¹⁴ reduce pain perception,¹⁵ and decrease the need for pharmacologic intervention.¹⁶ To create successful surgical music therapy programs, however, collaboration between music therapists and perioperative nursing staff members is vital.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

The surgical arena is often busy, and staff members may question whether there is time for integrating music in such a demanding setting. It is often nurses or other non—music therapy staff members who handle surgical music research and facilitation.¹⁵ The tasks of creating and implementing music therapy programs may be overwhelming to an often overworked or understaffed nursing workforce. Adding another task to an already demanding workload may promote stress, which can be detrimental to nurses' productivity and efficiency and can be instrumental in burnout.¹⁷ Furthermore, nurses often lack formal education in music facilitation and selection, and they may not have time to engage in the process of determining a music-listening experience. A patient may prefer a song or genre of music that may induce tears or memories that, without a therapist's processing, could lead to additional anxiety. Nursing staff members do not need to handle surgical music therapy alone, however, and they can partner with board-certified music therapists to bring the benefits of music to surgical patients.

Music therapy, the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals in a therapeutic relationship with a credentialed professional,¹⁸ is an occupation with goals that integrate with perioperative nursing practices and objectives. A recent study, facilitated by music therapists, found that a brief, five-minute preoperative music therapy session could significantly reduce patient anxiety.¹⁹ By working with board-certified music therapists, nurses may find allies in the quest to improve patient care.

Not all staff members are confident of the benefits of music in their work environment. Although music can improve performance for surgeons, other perioperative staff members may find music distracting.²⁰ A recent study found that music played for staff members during surgery may create tension by impeding proper communication.²¹ Other studies have found that music has a positive effect on surgical memory consolidation²² and may actually improve surgeon performance and speed.⁶ Music therapy programs, designed by professional music therapists who consider all involved parties, may be a beneficial adjunct

practice for patients and for staff members who overhear it.²³ Therefore, informed collaboration between nurses and music therapists in the surgical realm may be a worthwhile endeavor.²⁴

EFFECTS OF MUSIC THERAPY

During a recent randomized controlled trial at University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, the authors collaborated with nursing colleagues to introduce music therapy practices into the surgical area. The investigators studied the effect of both live and recorded music, facilitated by a board-certified music therapist, on the anxiety of 207 women 18 years or older undergoing ambulatory surgery for breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. In this institutional review board—approved study, researchers randomized participants into a control group, a live music group, or a recorded music group. Time before surgery is limited, so the researchers presented patients in the experimental groups with only one live or recorded preferred song at their bedside in the preoperative area. Recorded songs were played via iPod through headphones, and live songs were sung and played by the music therapist. The investigators assessed patient-rated anxiety using a visual analog scale, which consists of a simple horizontal line with the words “not at all anxious” and “highly anxious” written on either side. Patients provided a self-rating by marking a vertical line on the portion of the scale that corresponded with their anxiety level. Researchers administered the test to patients before and after the five-minute music therapy session or after a preoperative waiting period without music. Investigators found that, compared with the control group, participants in both live and recorded-music therapy groups experienced a significant reduction in preoperative anxiety ($P < .001$) and experienced point (percentage) anxiety reductions of 27.5 (42.5%) and 26.7 (41.2%), respectively.²⁴ In this trial, researchers determined that the intervention of one five-minute music therapy session (consisting of one preferred song, plus processing of emotion) significantly reduced anxiety. Such a brief, yet effective, addition to patient care is a worthwhile consideration in a busy clinical setting.

During and after our investigation, we collected subjective data about overall positive reactions to music therapy from patients, family members, and nursing staff members. Patients stated:

- “I loved the music. It really helped to give you something else to concentrate on other than feeling helpless.”
- “In a place where everyone has control over you and everything is a question mark, this gave me the power.”
- “If I didn't have the music, I'm sure I would've been very anxious. I felt very special, like a celebrity.”

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