

The Effects of Live, Bedside Music on Observed Patient Conditions

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Abstract

The Music for Healing & Transition Program, Inc.TM (MHTP) professionally trains and certifies musicians to provide live therapeutic music at the bedside to create a healing environment. MHTP collaborates with healthcare facilities and community organizations to educate about, and promote research in, the effectiveness of therapeutic music in the healing process and the life/death transition.

The objectives of MHTP are charitable and educational, and include:

- Serving the ill and dying with live music to facilitate and promote healing or assist in the life/death transition.
- Training musicians appropriately to provide live music to facilitate and promote healing or assist in the life/death transition.

A musician trained and certified by MHTP is a Certified Music Practitioner[®] (CMP).

MHTP defines healing as the restoration, realization, and/or maintenance of physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual wholeness. MHTP makes a distinction between “healing” and “curing,” with no claims to cure illness with music, even though research indicates that music is useful in a healing environment.

Outlined in MHTP’s CMP Scope of Practice, live, bedside music provided by a CMP involves:

- Being centered, fully present, and open and receptive to the patient’s physical, emotional, and/or spiritual needs that may be supported with live therapeutic music.
- Approaching the patient from the stance of being of service, rather than as a performer.
- Assessing the patient and the patient’s environment objectively and subjectively.
- Referring patient needs to other members of the healthcare team when the needs are not within the Scope of Practice of a therapeutic musician.
- Extending and adapting musical pieces to differing rhythm, meter, and tempo as required by the patient’s condition in-the-moment.

- Practicing within healthcare protocol, etiquette, and the facility's policies, structure, and procedures.

Example Therapeutic Music Session

A CMP provides a therapeutic music session after receiving a referral from a medical professional. For example, a charge nurse in the burn unit might direct a CMP to a patient who is having trouble managing their pain. The CMP would go to the patient's room and ask the patient's permission to provide therapeutic music. The CMP would explain that a typical session usually lasts for 20 minutes, but that the patient can ask to stop the session at any time.

If the patient gives their permission, the CMP would begin by determining the type of music to start the session with based on information provided by the charge nurse as well as the CMP's observations of the patient's condition. The CMP might consider: Does this patient appear to be in a lot of pain at this moment? Are they clenching their hands or face? Are they crying out? How is their breathing? If monitors are visible, what is their heart rate or blood pressure?

The CMP would then play music that they determine is appropriate for the patient condition. While playing, the CMP would watch the patient closely throughout, modifying the music as necessary in response to the patient's condition. For example, if the patient's body was clenched before the session, and they began to relax during the music, or their heart rate was stabilizing on the heart monitor, then the CMP would continue with music of the same type. However, if the patient's body remained clenched, or their heart rate remained unsteady, then the CMP would alter the music to something more suitable to the patient's condition. If the patient responded negatively to the music, then the CMP would immediately alter the music. In effect, the CMP would make constant adjustments during the session to ensure that the music created an environment that facilitates healing for this patient at that particular moment.

At the end of the session, the CMP would thank the patient and leave quietly. If the patient had fallen asleep, the CMP would leave without waking them. The CMP would then move on to the next patient that the charge nurse referred.