



Drumming in the Dark: Integrating Music Therapy Interventions with Traditional Healing Practices in Hospice Care

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ABSTRACT

Historically music has been used to comfort the dying and in rituals to honor and mourn the dead. The hospice movement is growing around the world and with it an expanding awareness of the value of holistic approaches in end of life care especially music and music therapy. An increasing number of hospices are employing music therapists as research grows to support the unique role of music therapy in addressing bio/psycho/social/spiritual issues with the terminally ill. Music can provide a safe vehicle for expression and communication of grief and sorrow at end of life, it can provide comfort, ease pain, improve mood and is particularly useful when verbal communication is no longer possible. Current hospice music therapy practice draws on medical music therapy models that for the most part do not include indigenous music and healing practices. What do traditional healing methods and spiritual practices have to teach us about the use of music with hospice patients? How do we incorporate indigenous methods into current music therapy practice to improve quality of life and ultimately the quality of death? This presentation will share case examples and highlight music therapy approaches that incorporate traditional healing practices and spiritual rituals in music therapy interventions with terminally ill patients. An overview of cultural approaches to death and care of the dying will be discussed with emphasis on specific uses of music in indigenous and spiritual healing practices. Music therapy interventions discussed will include chanting, singing, drumming vs. shamanic drumming, guided imagery and visualization and the creation of ritual as means for healing. Through both didactic and experiential methods participants will have the opportunity to explore and discuss music therapy approaches that incorporate traditional healing practices with hospice patients and how these practices can contribute to quality of life with the terminally ill. [The author can be reached at lthomae@keystonecare.com]