

Music therapy is a valuable clinical intervention for people of all ages and abilities. It can work where other therapies cannot, making connections and providing vital support.

Music therapy can help you express your feelings and make you feel better, whatever your health and emotional situation. We all relate to music because it connects with what it means to be human. Our bodies work to rhythms - from our heartbeats to our sleep patterns. Songs can evoke powerful memories. Even the way we speak has the tones, rhythm and structure of music.

This unique, client-led clinical intervention is accessible to everyone as no pre-existing musical skills are required. It's not about being able to play an instrument or learning musical skills. It's about making a connection and enabling people to communicate. Sometimes, when something is impossible to express in words, music can help you "talk" about how you're feeling.

Your music therapist is a trained professional therapist who can guide you by tailoring the music therapy sessions to your needs. This will help you to get the greatest benefit.

The therapist can also help support your family in shared sessions.

Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust is the leading music therapy charity in Northern Ireland and has wide experience of providing music therapy palliative care clients. Music therapists are Allied Health Professionals and must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

Contact us to find out more.



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Music Therapy In Palliative Care

In palliative care, music therapy can bring benefits in the following areas:

- Communicative/expressive support: self-expression, acknowledging and supporting mood, emotional regulation and support
- Psychological and physical support: alleviating pain, anxiety, fatigue, discomfort, preparation for loss, improving self-esteem and identity, improving emotional wellbeing and quality of life
- Addressing spiritual and existential needs
- Reducing isolation, promoting social inclusion and interactions, strengthening bonds, facilitating communication
- Legacy and life review work

Every music therapy session is tailored precisely to the needs of the person taking part, but for example a session may include:

- Shared improvisation or playing pre-composed music.
- Listening to, playing, singing or discussing familiar music which has particular meaning for you.
- Life review, reminiscence and legacy work, including creating recordings.
- Using song parody - setting poems to music, or creating your own music or lyrics facilitated by the therapist.

Michael is a palliative care patient in a neurological unit. He has a diagnosis of Secondary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis. Michael can understand conversations, demonstrating awareness and an interest in his environment and those around him, yet his physical ability limits him to a few head movements and restricts his communication but certainly not his wish to communicate!

Staff felt that music therapy might provide Michael with important opportunities to improve his quality of life and give him an avenue to communicate, feel connected to others and provide a space for 1-1 emotional support.

In music therapy sessions, Michael is encouraged to use eye movement and subtle gestures to choose a preferred song for the therapist to sing, lead the therapist's music on a chosen instrument and reflect on song lyrics and life themes. He is offered opportunities to engage in relaxation exercises, listen to new music or experience instrument playing through hand on hand support.

All this and more enables Michael to feel empowered while also having his choices, thoughts and opinions valued. The music therapy space also provides a safe environment for emotions to be felt, explored and held by a professional therapist.

Joint work has included working alongside occupational therapists to explore Michael's likes, dislikes and life story through song lyric analysis. This knowledge can then be passed on to all staff so better communication and connection can be made with the patient.

Staff have noticed that Michael looks forward to his session each week as not only is it enjoyable, but it affords him the chance to truly be himself in a creative and meaningful interaction with another.

"...choices, thoughts and opinions valued"

...truly be himself in a creative and meaningful interaction"

