



Healing music

Therapy through song eases pain, boosts morale of seriously ill, experts say

By Sonja Haller
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There's a reason even the most flat, tone-deaf and shrill of us sing in the shower: It makes us feel good, says music therapist Donalyn Richardson.

The Valley medical community now, too, is embracing the feel-good properties of music for the treatment of cancer and rehabilitation. Mesa's Banner Desert Medical Center, for example, recently received national certification as a music-therapy internship site. The program reflects the fact that music therapy is gaining ground as a complementary

treatment.

"It's definitely a feather in our cap," said Richardson, Banner Desert's music therapist. It signifies "more of a support from a traditional medical standpoint that people are more than their bodies."

Scottsdale Healthcare and Phoenix Children's Hospital also have expanded their music-therapy programs in recent years.

Music therapists say they are being afforded the same credibility as speech and physical therapists, thanks to growing evidence of music's tangible health benefits.

Consider:

■ According to a study last



year released in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, people who listened to music for an hour every day for a week reduced their chronic pain by up to 20 percent and lowered their depression by as much as 25 percent. Participants in the study kept a pain journal during that week; the study didn't indicate how long patients benefited from the therapy after it was discontinued.

■ The Cleveland Clinic in 2001 found that music lowered stress levels and helped build immunity in young cancer patients. It is unclear how long patients' immunity stayed elevated.

■ A University of Miami researcher who continued his work at Michigan State University found in 1999 that levels of melatonin in Alzheimer's

patients increased and that patients became more active, slept better and cooperated more with the nursing staff after undergoing four weeks of music therapy. The increased levels of melatonin — a hormone linked to sleep regulation, increased immunity and calm and relaxed mood — stayed elevated for up to two weeks after the music stopped.

Other research suggests that music boosts weight gain in premature infants, lowers the heart rate and improves the recovery time of stroke victims.

Valley music therapists offer more heartfelt evidence. Richardson, of Banner Desert, speaks of writing lullabies with mothers on the verge of premature delivery so they can

The sound of music is one of healing

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relax and know they are bonding with their child, and of being thanked by a family that was comforted when she sang *Amazing Grace* at the bedside of a dying person.

Music therapist Lisa Sampson, who works with Phoenix Children's Hospital, said anecdotal evidence, such as a patient who previously showed no arm movement but who now can shake a tambourine during music therapy, abounds.

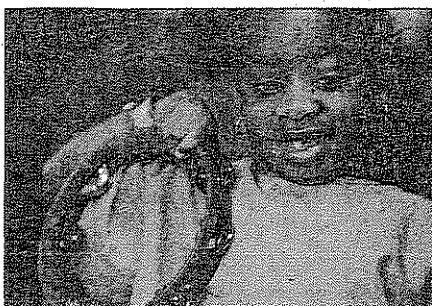
"What's really neat about music is that even if I don't speak Taiwanese or Korean, I can bring in a huge ocean drum that sounds like the ocean and the child and I can move it back and forth," Sampson said. "We don't need to speak the same language to understand one another."

Sampson began doing mu-

sic therapy in the Valley in 1999. She now oversees 16 people who work in hospitals and other medical settings.

Since Jim Merrell at Scottsdale Healthcare began full-time music therapy in 2004, several music-based outpatient services have been added. They include breathing through music; music and movement; and classes in SignChiDo, a relaxing therapy incorporating breathing, sign language and music. In November, music therapy will expand into the recently opened hospital Scottsdale Healthcare Thompson Peak.

Music therapists hope the research and other evidence increasingly persuade insurance companies to pay for music therapy once hospital



MARK HENLE/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
Olivia Jean-Pierre, 5, shows her tambourine skills during therapy at Banner Desert Medical Center.

patients are discharged but still need care. Private insurance is beginning to make such reimbursements, Valley music therapists say.

Music therapy is far more sophisticated than a sing-along, though in some settings it may look just like play.

In a tiny circle of chairs at Banner Desert Medical Center, parents accompanied chil-

dren who, in wheelchairs or attached to intravenous drips, banged on the drums they held in their laps. Richardson told them to "think about what's bugging them big time," to put that thing in the center of the drum, and to pound as loudly as they want.

Dallas Vaughan, 6, put his boredom and frustration at being separated from his Mesa siblings in the drum's center with a series of pings. His father, Scott, beat his own drum loudly.

He said he was grateful that his son was better off than many of the children being treated there for cancer. But he was frustrated that the metal ball his son accidentally swallowed three days ago hadn't passed and that an operation loomed.

After the drumming, Vaughan's shoulders lev- and he grinned. "I couldn't say enough good things about

How to relax to music

Lisa Sampson, board-certified music therapist, and Duffy McMahon of Innovative Therapies in Phoenix suggest ways to maximize using music for relaxation and stress reduction:

- Select a CD with music that plays at 60 to 70 beats per minute or fewer. As a general rule, slow songs have a tempo of about 60-90, medium dance songs about 100-120 and faster songs about 120-160.
- Listen to a CD with which you are unfamiliar. This allows you to actively listen instead of anticipating where the music is going and then associating the music with other feelings and experiences of your life.
- If you have them, use headphones to eliminate outside sound.
- Find a comfortable spot to sit or lie.
- Turn off the TV and other noise.
- Close your eyes.
- Do deep and then easy breathing.
- Listen uninterrupted and motionless for 15 to 30 minutes.

— Compiled by Sonia Haller

this program," he said.

This group music-therapy session was for children, but the restorative power of music doesn't discriminate, Richardson explained.

In a day, Richardson might host a group therapy class, help a troubled adult write and record a song to take home, and help a patient compile a list of favorite songs to listen to before and

after surgery.

Maureen Cahill, senior clinical manager of pediatric oncology at Banner Desert Medical Center, said she believes that music therapy was a fill 15 years ago.

"Then I became convinced," she said. "If we could study it here, I do believe these kids who use music as a symptom

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reliever use less pain meds, less often."

Sick children can be more stoical than adults, Cahill said.

"There's a lot of inward thinking. 'Will I be OK after the next treatment? Will I be asked to the prom? Will I grow my hair back?' A lot of kids don't talk about it. They don't want to worry their already-worried parents. I've seen over time that a lot of kids find ways to give voice to that worry through music."

Music also helps children to be recognized as individuals just by being able to pick out a song they want to listen to, sing or play. That's important in a setting where everyone wears a similar smock and has little control over their treatment, Cahill said.

Before everyone left Richardson's group therapy class, she asked the children to pick their favorite song. A girl whose hair had fallen out chose *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. Using an instrument called a Q Chord (melody is created by rubbing a finger along its length), the girl played and Richardson sang along, with others joining when they knew the words. One boy chose *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*.

Dallas Vaughan chose *Wake Me Up When September Ends*, by Green Day. He flashed a double-wide smile

Therapeutic music CDs

The following are touted as aids in healing and recovery.

CD | Artist | Cost

'DELTA SLEEP SYSTEM 2.0' | Jeffrey D. Thompson | \$11.98

Claims: Getting enough delta sleep — the most physically relaxed stage of sleep — is possible with these lush layers of soothing melodies weaving through a world of ethereal instruments and natural sounds. Subtle pulses within the music will coax your brain waves toward deep delta sleep.

'FREQUENCIES: SOUNDS OF HEALING' | Jonathan Goldman | \$16.98

Claims: A collection of excerpts from award-winning recordings including ancient and culturally diverse sacred sounds, cutting-edge psycho-acoustic frequencies, solo/group toning and chanting, musical textures and dolphin songs. Comes with a 16-page booklet that explains the story of each track as well as scientific/historical influences and suggested healing uses.

'HEALING POWER MEDITATIONS: CANCER RECOVERY'

| Various artists | \$18.98

Claims: Music and the positive affirmations provide hope and empowerment to people with cancer. This meditation relaxes and soothes to put the mind and body in a positive state, thus assisting with recovery, pain management and survival.

'STOP SMOKING' | Mesmer | \$19.99

Claims: Track 1 explains how to develop powerful visualization to achieve smoking cessation. Track 2 is the hypnosis with soft background music. In this focused state, the listener can soon quit smoking.

'SOUND MEDICINE: MUSIC FOR HEALING' | Steven Halpern | \$9.98

Claims: Soothing and free-floating keyboard compositions draw the body into balance and harmony. These compositions synchronize the hemispheres of the brain and amplify the production of alpha waves. This natural response is associated with feelings of deep relaxation, contentment and well-being.

— Compiled by Sonja Haller

and then turned serious as he concentrated on guiding his finger to play the song.

Richardson asked Dallas' father if he, too, wanted to select a song. The latter chose *Hotel California*, by the Eagles. Everyone in the room,

from children to parents to nurses, sang loudly and uninhibitedly, just as they would in the shower.

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