

## **Evidence Report: British Association for Music Therapy**

**Health and Social Care Select Committee – May 2020**

### **Introduction**

The British Association for Music Therapy is the national charity providing professional support for Music Therapists, raising awareness & providing information about music therapy for the public. Music therapy is an established psychological clinical intervention delivered by HCPC registered Music Therapists, to help people of all ages – babies, children, adolescents, adults and the elderly - whose lives have been affected by injury, illness or disability through supporting their psychological, emotional, cognitive, physical, communicative and social needs.

Influenced by many approaches, music therapy practice is diverse and supported by a robust and expanding evidence base. Currently, Music Therapists in the UK work in:

- Neonatal units;
- Paediatric units and hospitals;
- Nurseries (mainstream & additional support needs);
- Primary and Secondary schools (mainstream, PMLD & additional support needs);
- NHS hospitals;
- Mental health units (inpatient, community & forensic);
- Neurorehabilitation units (inpatient & community);
- Prisons;
- Community healthcare settings (such as nursing homes including those for individuals with Dementia);
- Hospices.

Training is a Masters level qualification and regulated by the HCPC. As Allied Health Professionals, Music Therapists work as part of multi-disciplinary teams to best support the overall holistic care for each patient including supporting carers and families of patients. Music therapy can be offered individually or in groups depending on the reason for referral.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, music therapy in the UK was almost exclusively delivered in-person. Since the lockdown, Music Therapists have utilised creative skills and technology to continue where possible providing therapy to the most vulnerable members of society using online platforms. Two examples of the many incidences of digital music therapy have recently been reported on BBC News:

- 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020: One-to-one music therapy conducted online with a vulnerable child and her family, who had been unable to attend their regular sessions at Haven House Children's Hospice due to coronavirus (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-52231333/coronavirus-music-therapy-for-high-risk-children>).
- 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020: Group music therapy project 'Together in Sound', provided by Anglia Ruskin University and the Saffron Hall Trust. Attended by individuals with Dementia and their carers (mostly family members), participants describe it as a 'lifeline'

during the pandemic (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-essex-52375524/coronavirus-online-music-therapy-group-a-lifeline-in-pandemic>).

These are two examples demonstrating the significant emotional benefit of the continuation of music therapy services during this pandemic. There is a wealth of evidence-based research on the efficacy and impact of music therapy on all patient populations, including Cochrane Reviews, Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), qualitative and quantitative studies.

Neuroscience, for example, documents the positive effect music therapy has on the neurologic population (Thaut et al., 2014; Magee et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2006). The Cochrane Review on music interventions for acquired brain injury highlight the vast range of evidence for how music therapy assists in gait, communication, quality of life and upper limb function following a stroke (Magee et al., 2017).

This submission aims to set out evidence based benefits that music therapy provides for issues specifically related to the Covid-19 pandemic: trauma, bereavement, palliative care and mental health. It will also recommend that Music Therapists, experienced and already established within healthcare settings throughout the UK, be further utilised to assist the Government in meeting extra demand for mental health services, provide healthcare to vulnerable groups who are shielding and enable positive change in healthcare during and after Covid-19.

## **Meeting extra demand for mental health services**

### **1. Mental health**

Music therapy should be integral to any mental health team enhancing its holistic support and treatment for anyone who requires it. Music Therapists could be utilised further to provide people with existing mental health issues additional support as well as immediate support to those affected by coronavirus, including frontline staff, survivors and the bereaved.

The Doctors' Association UK survey of 350 NHS staff highlighted concerning statistics on the mental health of frontline healthcare practitioners. With 57% reporting high levels of stress which left them 'overwhelmed or unable to cope because of pressure at work', 11% 'feeling suicidal', an additional 3% 'suffering self-harm' and almost 48% stating they 'did not feel mental wellbeing support has been adequate', it is clear that further and immediate psychological support is urgently needed for NHS staff (DAUK and ITV News look at the impact of Covid-19 on the Mental Wellbeing of NHS staff, 2020).

The pandemic will have a significant impact on the mental health of healthcare practitioners, and some are likely to be left traumatised by:

- Significant rise in patient deaths (more than some will have seen before);
- Being unable to support families to be with loved ones in their final hours due to physical restrictions;

- Contracting coronavirus themselves;
- Losing close friends and team members.

Music Therapists are trained in supporting those in crisis and/or experiencing trauma. The Government's mental health outcomes strategy in 2011 called for prioritisation of early intervention, the personalisation and diversification of mental health services (HM Government, 2011). "All Our Health", the Public Health England framework, also calls for team managers and leaders to "Provide a psychologically safe environment for patients, visitors and staff and promote mental health in the workplace" (PHE, 2019).

## 2. Patients

There are four Cochrane Reviews documenting efficacy of music interventions for patients; two specifically detail benefits for mechanically ventilated patients and preoperative anxiety:

*Cochrane review for music interventions for preoperative anxiety (Bradt et al., 2013)*

- Patients awaiting surgery experience high levels of anxiety, resulting in physical manifestations such as slower wound healing, increased risk of infection, complications with induction of anaesthesia and postoperative recovery;
- Sedatives and anti-anxiety drugs cause negative side effects, extend patient recovery periods and are costly to health services;
- Music listening, a non-pharmacological intervention, can have a beneficial effect by reducing anxiety more than standard care interventions alone;
- One large study (Bringman, 2009) showed music interventions to be more effective for preoperative anxiety, heart rate and blood pressure reduction than midazolam.

*Cochrane review for music interventions for mechanically ventilated patients (Bradt et al., 2014)*

- Mechanical ventilation causes major distress and anxiety for patients and their loved ones;
- Music listening has been found to consistently reduce respiratory rate, blood pressure and has a positive impact on consumption of sedatives and analgesics;
- Non-invasive music listening "may provide a viable anxiety management option to mechanically ventilated patients".

Crucially, this Cochrane review strongly advocates for Music Therapists to be involved in choosing appropriate music for patients. Bradt et al. (2014) discourage using commercial music such as hospital radio stations, recommending clinical staff consult their Trust's Music Therapist or seek out one if one is not available:

*"It is recommended that Music Therapists collaborate with medical personnel in this setting to carefully assess and evaluate the complexity of physiological responses in these patients. Vice versa, it is important that medical personnel providing music experiences to intensive care unit (ICU) patients consult with a Music Therapist to understand the differential impact of specific music parameters on relaxation responses as well as to perform an accurate assessment of patients' musical preferences."* (Bradt et al., 2014)

Music for patients can be organised and sent to healthcare staff to play on a patient's music player including mobile phones. While Music Therapists may not be able to be physically present in wards, they can provide clinical staff with training on how and when to utilise such material as well as advise on how to support patients, families and colleagues emotionally during this time.

### 3. Healthcare staff

Music Therapists can adopt similar techniques for healthcare practitioners. North London Music Therapy ([www.northlondonmusictherapy.com](http://www.northlondonmusictherapy.com)) is leading an initiative providing telephone psychological support for frontline staff. Clinicians can speak to qualified Music Therapists who offer psychological first aid, online music making and creation of bespoke playlists for emotional regulation.

Trauma and PTSD are initiated by stressful, frightening and distressing events. It is likely that a high number of healthcare staff will experience these conditions during, and after, the pandemic as symptoms can often appear long after the event.

Music therapy demonstrates it can effectively help individuals with PTSD and dissociative conditions to:

- Alleviate avoidance, re-experiencing trauma & hyperarousal while
- Support stabilising behaviours, physiological entrainment and processing of trauma (McFerrin et al., 2020; Carr et al., 2012; Bensimon et al., 2008).
- Service users report improved quality of life and reduction in interpersonal issues following music therapy (Rudstam et al., 2017).

PTSD and anxiety have been linked to hyperarousal of specific brain regions. Guided Imagery in Music (GIM) utilises music listening in a deeply relaxed state to stimulate imagery, memories and feelings to help patients understand life issues holistically. GIM studies demonstrate how neurological changes in PTSD patients aid management of cognitive processes such as hyperarousal (Beck et al., 2018).

Early intervention is strongly recommended. Researchers call for adequate access to therapy, stressing "they should get as much therapy with the same therapist as is necessary for healing and maintaining a healthy condition" (Maack et al., 2012).

As music therapy is now accessible online a wider number of staff can be reached, including those self-isolating.

### 4. General population: Adults

There are Music Therapists currently working with patients with psychopathological conditions such as depression, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. This includes in-patient care, community and forensic services.

Music Therapists can further assist mental health services which may be experiencing higher referral rates. Carr et al., (2012) summarise that even short-interventions of music therapy in in-patient care are effective as structured musical participation with verbal discussion, regular

contact and establishing boundaries help patients build a therapeutic relationship, develop interpersonal skills and build resources to help manage their conditions.

Adults with depression can at times be offered group music therapy. The Cochrane review of music therapy for depression demonstrates group music therapy alongside standard care interventions improves social, occupational and psychological functioning (Aalbers et al., 2017).

Greater use of music therapy within this population could also help reduce healthcare costs across communities:

*“Depression incurs high costs for healthcare systems and for society because it may cause impairment in both psychological and socio-occupational functioning. Reductions in depressive and anxious systems and consequent improvement in everyday life functioning may reduce the costs that burden both healthcare systems and society.”* (Aalbers et al., 2017)

The Cochrane review of music therapy for schizophrenia and schizophrenia-like disorders detail:

- Positive impact on motivational, emotional and relational outcomes
- Improves “global state, mental state (general negative, depressive and anxiety symptoms), functioning (general and social), and quality of life” (Geretsegger et al., 2017, p. 2).

Authors stress that given this high level of evidence, music therapy should be made ‘more widely available’ (Geretsegger et al., 2017, p. 23).

##### 5. General Population: Children & Young People

Studies on music therapy with children and young people with anxiety/multiple psychopathological conditions have shown it is an effective clinical intervention (Gold et al., 2004).

Children and young people can struggle to access therapies that are purely verbal – music therapy offers a non-invasive safe space for self-expression without a need for words. This is particularly beneficial to children who are unable to access verbal communication due to disability, maturity or trauma. Structured music activities help patients focus and sustain attention, which is particularly helpful for those with behavioural or developmental disorders.

The music therapy team at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is integral to its Child Development Services. These Music Therapists provide therapeutic assessment, treatment and support for children with developmental conditions and their families. The scope of their clinical work has extended into early intervention community work, hospital wards such as neonatal intensive care and paediatric wards as well as research (Wood et al., 2016).

Hospitalised children, particularly those admitted to ICU, experience high levels of anxiety during and after hospital stays. Research indicates increased parental distress, length of stay & emergency admissions contributes to:

- Elevated anxiety;
- Increased negative behaviours;
- Reduction in quality of life in children post hospital stay (Rennick et al., 2009).

Music is also linked to reducing pain and anxiety in paediatric oncology patients.

Children with leukaemia regularly have to withstand lumbar punctures, a painful invasive procedure. In a RCT examining impact of music listening on pain, heart and respiratory rates, Nguyen et al. (2010) found significant reduction in all three areas.

Music acted as a distractor, assisting patients in enduring the perceived pain and anxiety. Following interviews with the participants, researchers noted:

*“When the children had earphones with music, they felt less pain and were calmer and relaxed during and after the procedure. All these children definitely wanted to have earphones with music the next time they were treated. Almost all the children in the control group expressed pain, fear, and anxiety.”* (Nguyen et al., 2010, p. 153).

## 6. Dementia

The profile of music therapy within dementia care has risen in recent years, due to documentaries such as BBC One’s ‘Our Dementia Choir with Vicky McClure’ as well as Cochrane Reviews, NICE Guidelines and the Dementia Commission launched in the House of Lords (2018). These all strongly advocate for greater access to music therapy during all stages of dementia.

The national campaign, Music for Dementia 2020, is driven by the evidence of the positive impact music has on dementia patients at all stages of the condition. It was set up as a direct response to the Commission report, striving to make music readily available and accessible to all those with Dementia (<https://musicfordementia2020.com/>).

Empirical evidence shows that music therapy helps:

- Reduce agitation, disruptive behaviour & depressive moods;
- Improves quality of life;
- Pharmacological interventions used to manage anxiety and distress can have negative side effects;
- Music therapy could be a cost effective intervention to help reduce the administration of anti-anxiety medication (Ridder et al., 2013).

The population of people with dementia is expected to rise to 1 million by 2025 (Bowell et al., 2018, p.25). Music Therapists are able to work remotely during the pandemic, therefore there is huge scope for these therapists to be utilised in a variety of ways including online training or digital sessions.

A number of Music Therapists use their expertise to train staff to use music to help maintain lower distress and anxiety in patients during daily care. A large randomised control trial (RCT) is currently being organised to examine the impact of carer-led music interventions on use of pharmacological interventions (Baker et al., 2019). Music Therapists could offer additional

training for staff in building musical resources to manage patients' stress without the need for anti-anxiety drugs.

Furthermore, projects such as 'Together in Sound' (discussed earlier in this report) show that continuing group work is possible where patients are supported in accessing the relevant technology.

## **Providing healthcare to vulnerable groups who are shielding**

### **1. Bereavement care**

Individual and group music therapy for those facing bereavement or recently bereaved:

- Facilitates greater self-expression;
- Fosters understanding of emotions that arise;
- Group work offered for children helps normalise their experiences and build resilience (Heath et al., 2012).

The Department of Health's 'End of life care strategy' (2008) highlighted:

*"deaths from large scale pandemics will generate different support needs for carers and families who may be suffering illness themselves, in addition to coping with bereavement."* (DHSC, p. 113)

This is especially true given the rapid decline of coronavirus patients, the pressure this puts on healthcare staff and the emotional difficulties of physical restrictions. This is also a highly anxious time for hospitalised patients; it is therefore imperative that a range of bereavement services is available. Access to music therapy would mean those who may struggle to access verbal counselling due to trauma or disability can still receive therapeutic support.

One-off group music therapy can be an effective supplement to ongoing grief counselling (Krout, 2005). This model could be particularly effective in busy healthcare environments, allowing for shared normalising of the grief process.

It should be noted that individuals who are experiencing great emotional and psychological distress should be offered one-to-one music therapy. Individuals can then transition into group therapy as part of their healing process.

### **2. Palliative care**

Music therapy is well established within palliative care, with Music Therapists working in paediatric, oncology and adult hospices throughout the UK. The aims of music therapy in these settings are to:

- Improve quality of life & comfort;
- Support validation;
- Alleviate isolation.

Terminally ill patients are often administered analgesic medication to help manage pain and distress, which can result in unwanted side effects. Archie et al. (2013) indicate that music

therapy with cancer patients decreases use of analgesics and reduces anxiety during invasive procedures, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

A series of studies conducted in Northern Ireland by the MusiQual group also highlight music therapy with palliative care patients has a positive physiological impact on brain structures that control anxiety and stress (Kirkwood et al., 2020).

An RCT demonstrated that even one session of music therapy can reduce pain in palliative care patients, giving individuals autonomy to be actively involved in the management of their pain (Gutsgell et al., 2013).

During the pandemic, Music Therapists are successfully finding ways to continue to support hospice patients and their families through online remote working, the provision of pre-recorded material for patients to listen to as well as live instrumental playing in corridors, car parks and gardens.

Music can help adult and child patients and their families to process and manage difficult emotions. Given the high death rate of coronavirus, now, more than ever, is the time for Music Therapists to be supported to reach those most vulnerable and in need of psychological help.

### **Enabling positive change in healthcare**

Music Therapists are currently working in health, social and educational settings. They are highly trained and experienced in how to support those in crisis or experiencing trauma. They are able to provide support to a wide range of patient populations, both verbally and non-verbally, to those who need it most. Music Therapists are able to offer in-depth support to those with severe and complex behavioural, psychological, cognitive, social and emotional difficulties.

It is clear from the evidence documented in this report that while music therapy is an established profession in the UK, it is an underused resource that could be far better utilised during and after the pandemic.

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