Music Therapy and its Effects on Various Medical Patients: A Work In Progress

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Methodology
The best way to research music therapy and its effect on various medical patients is through meta-analysis. Looking at previous research, such as previous case studies, recent statistical research, and experimental studies, and compiling this information will give a better view of music therapy. It may also tell us what it is about music therapy that seems to work so well for so many different kinds of medical patients.

Possible Literature to be Reviewed

Abstract
Music therapy is a special type of therapy that involves all of the human senses to help medical patients with their health. This type of therapy can be associated with many different fields of medicine, from helping stroke victims to helping those with severe psychiatric disorders. Music is used in a therapeutic fashion in order to assist certain patients that are not affected by other types of therapy. The purpose of this project is to determine what types of patients are positively and successfully affected by music therapy and what fields of medicine are best associated with music therapy.

Literature Reviewed
To better research the different types of patients and different fields associated with music therapy, I have compiled a few sources of existing studies and research about older patients, psychiatric patients, and patients with speech impediments that discuss mixing music therapy and speech pathology.

Many older patients who suffer from strokes and dementia benefit from the help of music therapy. According to Dr. Concetta Tomaino (2009), some stroke survivors who could speak only a few coherent words could sing lyrics to old songs they knew. When they sang these songs, sometimes the patients could redevelop their speech (Tomaino, 2009). Also, these patients sometimes took tests to see if they could recognize objects on a table, and “9 times out of 10, they [the patients] can’t name them, but if they sing first, 9 times of 10 they can” (Tomaino, 2009, p. 6). She also goes on to talk about her patients in the dementia unit: “The catatonic people opened their eyes, the agitated people calmed down, and half of them started singing along with me” (Tomaino, 2009, p. 6) when she began singing “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” to them.

Psychiatric patients can also benefit from the effects of music therapy. The benefits are represented in the experiment set up by a few Korean doctors, Ae-na Choi, Ph.D., Myeong Soo Lee, Ph.D., and Hyun-Ja Lim, RN, Ph.D. (2009). The purpose of their experiment was “to test whether group music therapy is effective for improving depression, anxiety, and relationships in psychiatric patients” (Choi, Lee, Lim, 2008, p. 567). In their experiment, they used twenty-six psychiatric patients and split them up non-randomly into a group that would be treated with music therapeutic treatments, such as listening, creating, and writing music with therapists, and a control group (Choi, Lee, Lim, 2008). The music group was to attend fifteen sixty-minute therapy sessions, occurring a few times each week, while the patients in the control group continued their old treatments and were not treated in any way with music therapy. The results showed that those in the music group improved significantly, especially those with depression, state anxiety, trait anxiety, and relationships (Choi, Lee, Lim, 2008). While this experiment proves that music therapy can be effective for psychiatric patients, it does bring up a question with the non-random selection of the patients to the two groups, what would have happened had the groups been picked randomly? Would certain patients not have responded as well in the music group, or vice versa?

Music therapy has also been integrated with speech-language pathology for children with severe communication handicaps. These fields are now working together because “music provides a structured medium to accentuate the meaning of language in the context of an enjoyable, motivating stimulus” (Geist, McCarthy, Rodgers-Smith, Porter, 2008, p. 311). Previous research has found that it also increases breath and muscle control, better vocalization, and improved articulation skills (Geist, McCarthy, Rodgers-Smith, Porter, 2008). The co-treatment model for music therapy and speech-language pathology is shown through a case study that the researchers created. Allen, a four-year-old boy who was born prematurely and had major problems in speech and vocalization, is the subject for this case study. He had been participating in speech pathology for some time, but it had not proved to work for him. When aspects of music therapy were integrated with speech-language therapy, the child responded well and “demonstrated an increased engagement when music was used in an activity” (Geist, McCarthy, Rodgers-Smith, Porter, 2008, p. 314). The model proved to be ideal for Allen, but would it be ideal for other patients facing the same problems? The question raised here is whether or not music therapy really works for everyone, and if not, exactly for whom it does work.

Why is research in music therapy important?
Music therapy allows people who cannot normally communicate through their words or actions to be in touch with reality. Many medical patients can be feeling hopeless, but when certain patients are introduced to a treatment that includes some version of music therapy, they tend to respond better than they did with the treatment they were previously receiving. Studying past cases where music therapy has worked and where it has not worked may enable us to identify why it works and therefore hone its power to further help medical patients.

References