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1. Presentation by Giorgos Tsiris from Nordoff Robbins (a national music therapy charity)

Definition of music therapy

The presentation explored a range of definitions and principles of music therapy; please see the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) website http://www.bamt.org/ for a full definition of UK practice. Giorgos explained that, while practitioners can refer to the use of music therapy in their work, the role of a ‘music therapist’ is a protected title, arising from two years training at Masters level, with accreditation through the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Definition of health

Giorgos proposed that our understanding of the role of music therapy is conditioned by our definition of ‘health’. We were referred to the work of Aaron Antonovsky, a professor of medical sociology, who coined the term ‘salutogenesis’ to describe an approach focusing on factors that support human health and wellbeing, rather than those that cause disease. This theory rejects the traditional medical model separating health and illness and takes account of the relationship between health, stress, and coping.

It was noted that music therapy in the USA tends to follow a medical model (Straus 2011), where the recipient is seen as disabled/defective and the therapist takes a corrective role to ‘normalise’ the patient. However, in the UK recipients are not treated as passive but are encouraged to take an active role and the therapy is usually tailored to individual need.
**Definition of music**

We were invited to examine our understanding of ‘music’. In the eyes of the therapist, music is treated not as an entity, but an action, experienced through relationships. For this reason, communication is at the heart of music therapy, with emphasis on turn-taking, intonation, imitation and initiation – skills which do not always come easily to those who have suffered brain injury or mental illness. The role of the music therapist therefore bears close links with the work of speech therapists and the two disciplines often work in tandem.

**Music therapy in a hospice setting**

Examples from a practice session illustrated the role of music therapy in enabling people with terminal illness to express negative emotions that they were unable to voice in other ways, for instance in the company of friends and family. It was noted that the music therapy also offered a sense of purpose and diversion.

A survey of staff perceptions at St. Christopher’s Hospice pinpointed the following benefits:

- Symptom management
- Altering mood
- Distraction (refocussing)
- Celebrating what we ‘can do’
- Exploration of identity
- Sense of being ‘in the now’
- Reminiscence, legacy

Recommended reading:

- The Music Child (pub. Nordoff Robbins)
- Communicative Musicality
- Music Health and Wellbeing

**2. Presentation by Jonathan Fever of the Rye Studio School**

The school accepts referrals for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties (EBD), physical difficulties and those suffering bereavement, depression, unhealthy attachment or withdrawal. It aims to offer ‘a good start in life’, and an accessible approach to music, along with opportunities for interaction and integration.

Common themes explored through the music therapy include:

- Harmony and dissonance
- Play and humour
- Silence and noise
• Narrative and improvisation
• Inclusion and separation
• Expression and internalisation

Following a period of music therapy, improvements were noted in pupils’ sense of self, interpersonal skills, confidence and motivation. There was also a reduction in oppositional or aggressive behaviour, assisted by the exploration of distress in a safe environment.

Improvements were also observed in the following areas:
• Fine motor skills and co-ordination
• Spatial awareness
• Muscle development
• Communication, including vocalisation/verbalisation
• Increased lung capacity

3. Presentation by Trish Vella-Burrows on Singing and Health

Music and dementia

Trish stressed the value of incorporating a degree of challenge into music sessions, in order to maintain and develop neural connections; for instance, by introducing new songs or new ways of working with familiar songs (eg, marking a particular beat of the bar or filling in missing words). Some gross-motor movement (eg, swaying) was also useful, along with activities involving co-ordination (eg, tapping claves).

Where possible, groups for people with dementia should be treated like any community choir, with similar repertoire and the inclusion of simple harmonies, canons and quodlibets, though it was helpful to have an assistant sitting with each group, to avoid confusion.

Music and Parkinson’s disease

A video showing a group in action helped to demonstrate the enjoyment and achievements to be gained through group music making. With people suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, it was important to include specific rhythm work to assist various movements (eg, stop/start activities). Working on the voice was also a priority for this group, who often had difficulties with articulation, intonation and breathing. For the participants, one of the major benefits was being in a supportive group with others who understand the condition.

Developments in health
The recent progress in accepting singing as a health therapy was applauded. However, health professionals generally required evidence in the form of scientific studies, with facts and figures to convince them about the validity of this approach. It was also noted that the current health model means patients are generally referred for a course of treatment that lasts for a specified number of weeks and this pattern is emerging with singing therapies.

Initially the researchers invited volunteers from choral societies to run groups but there was now a need to look at how to train a growing workforce so they have suitable skills and training opportunities.

4. Presentation by Maria Varvarigou on Music for Life: New Dynamics of Ageing

Maria presented findings from a project conducted with ‘healthy’ older people. With a substantial increase in the ageing population over the coming decades, it was anticipated that there would be a corresponding rise in age-related problems, such as social isolation. The project aimed to demonstrate that opportunities for ‘active ageing’ would lead to improved outcomes in health, participation and security, thus enhancing quality of life.

The benefits of music-making were grouped under the following headings:
- Personal motivation
- Musical motivation
- Social motivation (sense of belonging)
- Spirituality
- Health benefits

The study drew on qualitative data, including narrative from participants. Pre- and post-study questions were developed, using the CASP scale (Control, Autonomy, Self-realisation and Pleasure) – an accepted system for analysis in similar trials. A non-music control group ran alongside, offering alternative activities, including language learning and craft sessions.

Results from the study

Key findings from the participation group included:
- Sense of purpose
- Sense of control/autonomy
- Social affirmation (being valued as part of a group)

At the same time, benefits were observed in social/emotional wellbeing, cognitive ability (esp. concentration) and physical health (mobility, vitality and relaxation). Participants indicated a desire to be treated as serious learners – ie, given challenges and feedback.
Sessions were planned according to accepted pedagogical theory – ie, moving from known to unknown and simple to complex. One of the group leaders felt that “What’s important is the atmosphere you create in the session” (Nick Cross, East London Late Starters Orchestra).

A number of barriers to participation were recorded, including difficulties around time, venue, cost, ethnic and class perceptions, as well as a general lack of confidence. It was also noted that older people found it difficult to access information via the internet. However, the study concluded that musical development can occur across the lifespan and that older people are entitled to high quality musical opportunities. Further information can be found in 'Active Ageing with Music' by Creech, Hallam, Vargarigou, McQueen (IOE Press, 2014).

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