

What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a world-wide allied health profession. It is a goal-directed therapeutic intervention founded on the practical theory and clinical evidence that every person is uniquely responsive to music despite illness, impairment or disability in any sphere of personal functioning.

Music therapy is the planned use of music for health and wellbeing. No musical background or prior skill is necessary to benefit from music therapy.

Music can be used to engage and mobilise all aspects of human functioning.

From music's appeal to the inner person - the source of motivation and commitment - other faculties such as speech, song, memory, cognition, intellect, creative imagination and expressive motoric responses can be activated and developed in therapy, both as a new means of self expression and as a therapeutic goal.

Successful involvement in music not only awakens motivation and morale, it acts to co-ordinate the use of existing abilities, and provides the means for either maintaining these and rehabilitating damaged function.

Clinical Music Therapy

Clinical music therapy is the use of music within a therapeutic relationship with a music therapist that involves the client(s) in such a way that, through their response to music, problematic aspects of their health and wellbeing can be directly accessed, and addressed with benefit.

A music therapist has completed either a 4-year undergraduate or 2-year postgraduate university training in music therapy, accredited by the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA), and is registered as a Music Therapist (RMT) with the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA).

The training of the Registered Music Therapist (RMT) includes, amongst other areas, expert musicianship and clinical knowledge in such fields of health care as dementia and frail aged care, neurological rehabilitation, psychiatry, and palliative care.

Music therapy in aged care

The benefits of music therapy have been substantiated in a number of crucial areas of clinical intervention:

- For those with Dementing illnesses
- For those with Neurological damage or disease
- For those with Depression and Psychogeriatric illness
- For those receiving Palliative care

Music therapy can work with other therapeutic interventions to assist clients achieve maximum independence as well as optimum levels of mobility and dexterity.

The Dementias

Individuals living with a dementing illness can suffer firstly from a disabling neuropathology, and often secondarily from the accumulated experiences of confusion, failure, helplessness and loss of effective communication. Often the person's growing agitation and confusion has negatively impacted on their immediate social environment, creating a cycle of despair and accelerating the decline of wellbeing.

Therapeutic outcomes

- Reduced anxiety and agitation
- Amelioration of challenging behaviour patterns
- Increased interaction instead of isolation
- Maintenance and often improvement of cognitive skill.
- Improved morale and restoration of wellbeing.



Neurological injury and disease

Music therapists are trained to seek out and engage the musical responsiveness of individuals with a broad spectrum of impairments arising from neurological injury and disease syndromes. Addressing depression and despair is vitally important for successful rehabilitation. After finding an enjoyable successful point of contact in music, the clinical expertise of the music therapist, often working together with other therapies, is aimed to further build on the individual's existing skills while strengthening morale.

Therapeutic outcomes

- Conversational phrases can often be learnt through being sung to familiar songs
- Improved quality of verbal communication skills
- Increased neuromuscular control and co-ordination
- Improved cognitive-perceptual skills
- Rehabilitation of morale and motivation.

Depression and psychogeriatric illness

Music therapists have worked successfully with residents who are alienated from healthy interactions with staff and other residents because of their antisocial behaviour patterns. Such persons may bring with them unresolved or conflictual life issues and the transition to institutional life is a crippling blow to self-esteem. There is concern for their quality of life and wellbeing.

Music therapists have enabled depressed and 'acting out' residents to be reintegrated into a sense of community and mutually satisfying relationships with others, reducing stress and occupational risk to staff.

Therapeutic outcomes

- Improved communication skills
- Improved coping skills
- Decrease attention-seeking and or self-destructive behaviour.

Palliative care

Music therapy has been playing an increasingly important role in the care of those coming to terms with a life threatening illness. Music therapists bring two essential skills to palliative care - the clinical skill needed to support and accompany an individual in their journey with their illness; and the musical artistic skill to give this inner work authentic,

satisfying form and voice. Music therapy in this setting can make the difference between wellbeing or not.

Therapeutic outcomes

Wellbeing at the end of life through:

- Reduction of anxiety
- Amelioration of pain
- The possibility of authentically exploring and communicating core personal values and experience.

Music therapy approaches

Music therapists use a range of music-therapeutic approaches in their work, including:

- Song-writing
- Improvisation
- Music and relaxation techniques
- Music-based life review
- Singing
- Participation in instrumental ensembles
- Movement to music



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This flyer is an edited extract of a larger brochure on **Music Therapy in Aged Care**, prepared for the AMTA by Richard Thompson RMT. Please contact the AMTA for a copy of the full brochure.

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