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## FAST FACTS AND CONCEPTS #108

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**What is Music Therapy?** Music therapy uses the properties of music – sounds, rhythm, and personal attachment and universality of songs – for psychosocial and spiritual support and to complement other palliative care treatments.

**Who are Music Therapists?** Most music therapists have Bachelor and Masters Degrees in music therapy and receive training in music, behavioral science, and basic medical knowledge. They are certified by the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT). Those who pass the national music therapy certification examination earn the credential 'Music Therapist-Board Certified' (MT-BC).

**What do Music Therapists Do?** Music therapists develop specific treatment goals based on the patient and family's input and feedback from the multidisciplinary team. Techniques include singing, listening to music, playing instruments, lyric analysis, music-prompted reminiscence, songwriting, improvisation, and guided imagery with music.

**What are the Indications and Contraindications for Music Therapy?** Depression, anger, pain, anxiety, insomnia, nausea/ vomiting, boredom, loneliness, and confusion can be treated with music therapy; the only contraindication is patient preference.

**What Type of Patient Benefits From Music Therapy?** Music therapy significantly improved the quality-of-life of cancer patients compared to a control group not receiving music therapy; the benefits persisted as illness progressed. Pediatric patients may benefit from music therapy; music brings normalcy to an ill child's otherwise complicated life. They may be able to play or hear their favorite songs or continue playing instruments they played before they became sick.

### **How Does Music Therapy Impact Quality of Life?**

- Providing a basis for life review and reminiscence.
- Providing a means for relating to others.
- Distraction from physical pain and discomfort.
- Providing emotional comfort and relief from anxiety. Providing an enjoyable experience.
- Providing relief in the last hours of life.

**Are there Side Effects?** Music may unintentionally resurface negative feelings from the past; these can be addressed by working with the music therapist.

**How is Music Therapy Paid for?** Most music therapy is not billed to insurance. Therapists are funded either by grants, palliative care/hospice programs, or patient billing.

### **References**

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3. Hilliard RE. Music therapy in pediatric palliative care: complementing the interdisciplinary approach. *J Pall Care*. 2003; 19(2):127-32.
4. Hilliard RE. The effects of music therapy on the quality and length of life of people diagnosed with terminal cancer. *J Music Ther*. 2003; 40(2):113-137.
5. Information about Music Therapy certification can be found at the website of the American Music Therapy Association. Available at: <http://www.musictherapy.org/about.html>.

**Fast Facts and Concepts** are edited by Drew A Rosielle MD, Palliative Care Center, Medical College of Wisconsin. For more information write to: [drosiell@mcw.edu](mailto:drosiell@mcw.edu). More information, as well as the complete set of Fast Facts, are available at EPERC: [www.eperc.mcw.edu](http://www.eperc.mcw.edu).

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**ACGME Competencies:** Interpersonal and Communication Skills, Patient Care

**Keyword(s):** Psychosocial and Spiritual Experience: Patients, Families, and Clinicians

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