

UNDERSTANDING MUSIC THERAPY - CLEARING MISCONCEPTIONS

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Introduction

While there is a growing interest in the field of music therapy among medical professionals and students, and allied health care professionals and students in India, there are deep rooted misconceptions and a lack of clarity about this field. It is a matter of concern that though there is a lot of interest shown by these people in learning about how to offer clinical music therapy services, their knowledge is limited to the existence of music healing practices in Indian history and culture and they struggle to integrate these practices into clinical services. The confusion is about identifying what is healing and what is music therapy and understanding the difference between healing and music therapy. Also there is a strong belief that there are readymade general prescriptions of music available for curing various diseases. There is also an enigma around music medicine (music being used as therapy by medical professionals) and music therapy in which music is being used as therapy. The practices are based on belief systems using history as a tool. The various music therapy techniques apart from the receptive listening experiences are not still known due to lack of training. This article attempts to clear all these misconceptions and also explain what is music therapy, the theoretical background and the therapeutic processes involved in clinical music therapy sessions.

What is Music Therapy?

According to World Federation of Music Therapy, the definition of music therapy is as follows. Music therapy is the professional use of music and its elements as an intervention in medical, educational and everyday environments with individuals, groups, families or communities who seek to optimize their quality of life and improve their physical, social, communicative, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health and well being. Research, practice, education and clinical training in music therapy are based on professional standards according to cultural, social and political

contexts.¹ Music therapy is an interpersonal process in which the therapist uses music and all of its facets—physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic, and spiritual—to help clients to improve or maintain their health. In some instances, the client's needs are addressed directly through music; in others they are addressed through the professional relationship between the client and therapist.²

Healing and Music Therapy

What is a healing practice? Healing is deepened and inherited not so much with words but by “feeling in one's body, heart and soul” and “belief”.³ and music therapy is something observable and measurable. It is an evidence-based practice as indicated by many Cochrane reviews. “In some cultures the drive for theory is not so intense. Things are just known. Explanations are not always required for practices to be accepted. Understandings are transferred across the generations through action. Indeed, in some societies in which traditional healing practices are maintained, healing is contingent on not questioning the how's, why's, what's, when's, where's of the experience. In these societies, the value is on belief more than description or explanation.”³ This situation holds true for Indian situations. The local resources by way of healing practices like Raga Chikitsa, Vedic Chanting and Chakra activation exist as a strong belief system as a curative solution and the last decade of development in the music therapy field was based only on this premise. Now, new horizons have emerged. The unquestionable is being questioned. There is a shift from using the static-history as a tool for explaining the practice of art of healing to the dynamic music therapy workings which explain how music, therapy, cultural, spiritual and social context work in a clinical set up are rationalized.^{4,5} Further, we can question now how traditional practices located in a past that has its own validity can be transposed in time to the present.⁶ However, there is another understanding that music therapy in general is

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a rational science as well as an art with irrational aspects and anthropological, cultural and personal dispositions playing an important role in reception of music.⁷ By culture, we mean belief systems, philosophical orientations, tradition, religion, art, values and societal norms for behavior. In a country like India where there is a rich tradition and culture and philosophy of life is linked strongly to religion and spirituality, during the therapy process, when we want to connect to the client, the musical experiences which are closer to these aspects play a more important role than the drive for theory. The local healing resources which are available throughout history cannot be ignored completely as they strongly form the basis for the clients' actual needs. The principle function of music in these healing practices is at times healing, at times spiritual, at times religious, and sometimes a combination of these three elements.⁵ Hence, ways and means to integrate these resources become primarily important in practice, education and research. The unquestionable is questioned, also at the same time keeping in mind that the local resources should be transferred wherever possible with a need for explaining the processes involved.⁵

Methods and Responses

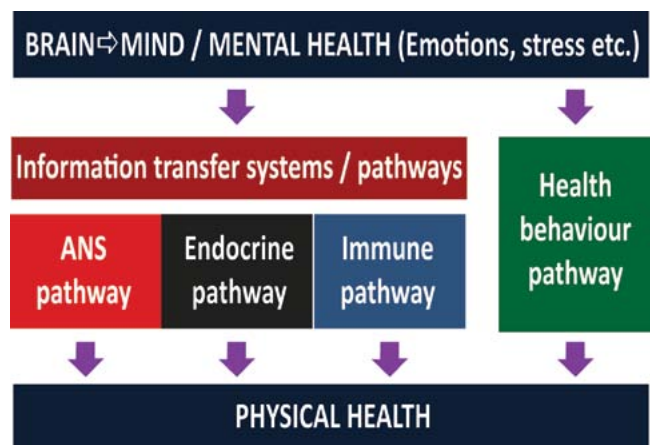
Also, the musical experiences that the therapists use in the music therapy sessions range widely from the methods of passive listening to the active recreative experiences, song writing, improvisation, playing of musical instruments and engaging in verbal discussion methods. Sometimes, the therapist sings and at other times, the clients sing. The therapist play both tuned and untuned musical instruments and also engage the clients with baseline, prompted, collaborative and independent musical tasks in singing, moving, rhythmic and playing musical instruments.⁸ The musical responses for engagement, pleasure, self-confidence and creativity levels are recorded during initial assessment to find out the musical profile of the client and for planning the therapy protocol.⁸ The therapist selects musical experiences depending on the needs of the clients and also the goals set for therapy.

The responses range from developing sensorimotor skills, learning adaptive behaviours, developing spontaneity, creativity and freedom of

expression and also developing communication and interpersonal skills. Individual singing exercises can help individuals who have speech impairments to help improve their articulation or fluency. Group singing builds reality orientation in elderly individuals, or help mentally retarded people develop adaptive behavior, or build cohesiveness in a dysfunctional family or group. Playing instruments can help physically disabled clients to develop gross and fine motor coordination.¹

Music Therapy Process and Outcome

The different stages of music therapy, a systematic process of intervention are 1) Referral, 2) A first session: Building Rapport, 3) Assessment, 4) Setting up Goals, Objectives and Targets, 5) Observation, 6) Music Therapy Strategies, 7) MT Treatment plan, 8) Implementation 9) Evaluation and 10) Termination⁸ During these stages the therapist works on modulating either the client's communication or the behavior, emotions, attention or cognition. The neuro biological outcome of the therapeutic musical dialoging depends on 1) the therapist recognizing the needs of the client and the client recognizing the intention of the therapist to help him 2) the therapist's ability to get into emotional resonance with the client 3) engaging in musical activities that result in shared attention between the therapist and the client 4) the therapist understanding the motivation and the intention of the client and 5) the cooperative action between the therapist and the client.⁹ The mind, a product of the brain, influences physical health through three brain-body information



transfer systems namely the autonomic nervous system (ANS), neuroendocrine pathways and

neuroimmune pathways and the health behavior pathways.¹⁰

Music therapy being a mind body medicine, the therapeutic musical dialoguing outcome during the music therapy process depend on how the brain transfers the information to the ANS, Endocrine and Immune pathways and the Health Behaviour pathway influencing the physical health. Researchers have indicated that there are many major computational centres for processing music in the brain which get influenced by appropriate musical inputs to transfer positive information to the ANS, Endocrine and Immune pathways to achieve physical health.

Music as Medicine Versus Music Therapy

Use of recorded music by medical professionals who may not be skilled musicians or music therapists in order to achieve desired biological effects is a regulatory approach called music medicine approach. which depends on the inherent quality of music to reach the desired goal. Music therapy is both a regulatory and a relational approach which has a interpersonal component working as a dynamic force within the therapeutic process between the therapist and the client. The following table indicate the

difference and the research designs between music in medicine and music therapy approaches.¹¹

Conclusion

Music therapy is both an art and science of healing and an evidence-based practice. The scientific aspect of this field is yet to be established firmly in India due to lack of adequate training facilities across the country. Pioneering efforts are being taken by medical universities such as Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth to launch professional training programs and introduce music therapy as a medical discipline not only to create awareness about the field but also to integrate music therapy into clinical practice based on education and research. The Centre for Music Therapy Education and Research, a unit of Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth has commenced a one year Post Graduate Diploma Program in March 2014. This initiative is surely an important milestone in India for the development of music therapy as a profession and an academic discipline.

TABLE 1. Therapeutic concepts and their research designs

Music medicine	Music therapy in medicine
Positivistic scientific tradition	Hermeneutic scientific tradition
Biomedical concept	Relational-medical concept
Music has therapeutic potential by itself	Emphasis on relation: therapist-client; music-client
Symptom orientation	Health orientation
Starting-point: illness	Starting-point: health (resources)
Music as medicine	Artistic-creative activity
Desired biological effects	Improved quality of life through creative expression of self

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