Numerous authors indicate that music therapy can alleviate the stressors from a hospital environment as well as the stressors from illness. It has been documented that for over 50 years, creative arts therapies have improved the quality of life for patients by facilitating relaxation, decreasing anxiety, and providing a distraction from the hospital environment. Furthermore, O’Callaghan, suggests that music therapy can calm, relieve distress, promote supportive relationships, and encourage creativity. More literature has shown that the anticipation of surgery produces a prominent amount of stress for patients. The anticipatory anxiety, may even impede the patient’s postoperative recovery process. In Oncological surgery, patients who experience preoperative anxiety have an increased likelihood of having post-operative anxiety. It is well documented that this stressful experiences carries on as the patient is transported to the surgical holding area.

The body reacts physiologically to anxiety by activating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and engaging the sympathetic nervous system to release hormones and catecholamines. These physiological reactions manifest as high blood pressure, heart palpitations, sweating, and rapid breathing. Anxiety can affect a patient postoperatively as well; cortisol and catecholamines can negatively impacting the immune system and deter the healing process. State anxiety and trait anxiety are two subdivisions to note when understanding anxiety and stress. State anxiety refers to an emotional response to a stressful event, and is temporary. Trait anxiety refers to a personality trait of anxiety that persists consistently throughout one’s life. Anxiety can be alleviated by anxiolytic medications, but their negative side effects often render them undesirable prompting health care professionals to search for nonpharmacological means of relieving stress.

The benefits of music therapy contribute to a sense of “normalcy” in an environment where one can become overstressed amidst hospital qualities such as chaos, coercion, and neglect. Yung et al., reported in his study that patients who listened to slow music via earphones for 29 minutes before their surgery had a significant reduction in heart rate respiratory rate and state of anxiety. In this study the authors select a panel of experts to decide which music will be used that had sedative characteristics. They defined music for sedation as having slow tempo and selected three slow music types to use in the study. No more information was given in regards to the music elements on the pieces selected or the titles. Another study done by Alam et al., looked at the effects of recorded guided imagery, and relaxing music in reducing patient pain and anxiety during cutaneous surgical procedures. There was no significant difference between groups, but a reduction in anxiety.

Considerable medical music therapy literature demonstrates the use of adapted music experiences to decrease the use of sedatives, analgesics, and anxiolytics. Presenting problems such as pain and anxiety are addressed in individualized music therapy treatment of patients in Oncology, Trauma, Burn, Psychiatric, and Toxicology units as well as in the waiting room of the emergency department. Music therapy has been studied with patients being weaned off mechanical ventilation, who are often administered sedatives that put the patient at risk for respiratory depression. Madsen and Silverman, found that playing live patient-preferred music could decrease patients’ anxiety, pain level, and nausea after receiving organ transplants, ultimately leading to an increased in their relaxation. Li and colleagues found that listening to patient-preferred music twice a day following a radical mastectomy helped to reduce anxiety. Each of these studies used music as a tool for promoting relaxation; however, they are missing the element of imagery. One technique in music therapy, called the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music, has been proven to be very successful in reducing anxiety levels through the addition of guided imagery.

The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery (BMGIM) was developed by Helen Bonny in 1970 at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. Goldberg, stated that this technique is considered unique in music therapy because it uses music to create an altered state of consciousness to further one’s own understanding of the self as cited by Beebe & Wyatt. Through this process, clients are given
the opportunity to get an introspective look into their own imagery, helping them to explore problems, issues, and strengths. Through this inner-personal exploration, clients can confront and conquer the root of their anxiety, resulting in a higher state of relaxation. The Bonny Method has a history of being used in the medical field due to its ability to help with patients’ pain, confusion, anxiety, and depression that sometimes result from the physical impact of medical procedures.

Adaptations of the Bonny Method were reported recently in a study done by Gimeno. In her study, she uses a music and imagery technique that she developed called Music Imagery Relaxation (MIR), to decrease anxiety and pain levels on post operative patients. MIR generally takes between 20-30 minutes, and the primary goal is to relax the body and the mind. It uses the concept of music and imagery to give patients the tools to reflect inwardly and conjure up positive images, promoting relaxation and decreasing anxiety. It does not dive deep into the psyche of the patient as the Bonny Method does, but uses patient’s preferred music and imagery to provide a relaxing experience. MIR showed statically significance in decreasing levels of anxiety and pain.20, 21

Indeed, music therapy researchers identify music therapy uses in the alleviation of pain and anxiety as perhaps the most effective use of music therapy in the field. This research on pain management and stress reduction through music therapy is supported by further exploration in emotional foundations of music as a non-pharmacological treatment modality for pain management.22 Much research needs to be done on the use of music and imagery paired together to decrease pain and anxiety and as Gimeno states, MIR, the abbreviated version of the Bonny Method of guided imagery reinforce the well-known psychological effects of the mind over patient’s physiological responses showing that music and imagery can promote relaxation in the hospital environment.

REFERENCES
