

The People Are Alive With the Sound of Music
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Music is a powerful thing. It can make us sing, it can move our bodies, and it can even bring us to tears. It makes us feel. Think about it – music is one of the few things universally enjoyed by every culture across the world. Whether it is used in celebration, in worship, in leisure, or as a form of expression, music is everywhere.

However, music has the ability to do a lot more than most people realize. It is so powerful, that professionals have found the use of music extremely helpful in dealing with patients with a wide-range of health-related issues, including physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic, or spiritual ones, (Wikipedia, 2009). For example, besides increasing our self-esteem and decreasing our stress levels, music can also help in dealing with depression, psychiatric disorders, physical handicaps, and substance abuse, (Scott, 2007).

The name for this practice is called music therapy. A recent study from Stanford University found that elderly patients who had depression increased their self-esteem and saw improvements in their mood after they were visited by a music therapist, (Willingham, 2009).

There is not just one way in which music therapy can be used to help people. Depending on what health-related issue is at hand, there are varying forms of music therapy that can be used to create different benefits. For example, the therapist may use the method of music improvisation, in which they would ask their subject to take a song and rewrite the words based on what feelings or emotions are stirred up within them

during a session. A music therapist may even have their client compose their own music entirely, (Wikipedia, 2009).

If recreating music is the therapy for the health problem, the subject will take lessons and learn how to make music with an instrument or by singing. There is also a simpler way in that music is used in therapy, which is just listening to it. The therapist will play a song that has lyrics that the client might be able to relate to, and it is used as a way to get them to connect and open up with them. With all of the various therapy methods mentioned above, the main goal is to get the person to emotionally bond with the therapist, (Wikipedia, 2009).

Studies have also shown that music can literally stimulate portions of the brain that affect physical symptoms. For example, some stroke victims that lose all of their motor skills may get treated with music therapy. When the song used has a steady, continuous beat, the music has the power to help them learn how to walk. The beat allows them to concentrate on stepping on the emphasized counts, and as a result, improves their ability to walk more efficiently compared to just traditional therapy alone, (Wikipedia, 2009).

Another study that shows how powerful and useful music can be was conducted by research cardiologist, Dr. Mike Miller. After doing research on how things like laughter and happiness affects our hearts, Miller decided to test the effects of music on our hearts. When the people he tested listened to music that they liked, he said “the inner lining of the blood vessel relaxed, opened up and produced chemicals that are protective to the heart.” When he made them listen to music that was not enjoyable to them, the vessels closed up, which is also what happens when people feel tensed or stressed,

(Willingham, 2009). This proves how music can counter the effects of stress. “It gives us an overall feeling of good, well-being -- a sense of euphoria in some cases,” Miller said.

With all of the positive elements listed above that are brought on by the power of music, it is not surprising that music therapy is a growing field of health care, (Scott, 2007). So next time that you are feeling a little stressed or nervous, you can be your own music therapist and just take a deep breath and put on some of your favorite tunes.

Sources:

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