

Tuning in to Meaningful Occupation: Using Music in Long-Term Care

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Approximately 1.4 million older adults reside in skilled nursing settings in the United States (Harris-Kojetin et al., 2013). The incidence of situational and clinical depression in this setting is alarmingly high (Ulbricht, Rothschild, Hunnicutt, & Lapane, 2017) and is related to loss of independence, feelings of social isolation and loneliness, ever-present death and grief, stale programming, and lack of meaningful in-house activities (Choi, Ransom, & Wyllie, 2008). Situational depression is defined as depression associated with major life changes, such as transitioning into a long-term care setting, whereas clinical depression is believed to consist of a complex relationship between brain function, genetic factors, and social context (Hirshfeld, 1981; Joyce, 2008). Green, Magee, Steiner, and Teachman (2017) investigated changes in depressive symptoms over time of 64,095 older adults who were newly admitted to long-term care facilities. The findings indicated that the prevalence of depression increased over a 3-month period (54.3 cases per 100 residents at initial assessment, compared with 60.8 cases per 100 residents by follow-up). In addition, more than 50% of the residents exhibited a high risk for depression both at admission and follow-up. It is difficult to delineate situational from clinical depression in residents who reside in long-term care facilities. However, changes in the aging brain, loss of physical and cognitive function, and disruption of environmental and social contexts can lead to depression and a decreased quality of life residents who reside in long-term care (Choi, Ransom, & Wyllie, 2008; Kirchen, Hersch, & Pickens, 2014).

Music as an Occupation (Means and End)

The practice of occupational therapy was founded on the belief that engagement in client-centered, purposeful, and meaningful occupations promotes the health, well-being, and quality of life of all persons (McLaughlin Gray, 1998). In the 1995 Eleanor Clark Slagle Lecture, Catherine Trombly described occupation as a means and an end. She states that occupation is both a treatment end goal and a means to remediate occupational performance challenges. Trombly emphasized that the occupational therapist must ensure that the therapeutic approach is skilled by facilitating the *just right challenge* for the client. In turn, the client must possess the motivation to engage in the therapeutic process, which is heavily dependent on the treatment session reflecting a client-centered, purposeful, and meaningful approach. Music is a universal and meaningful occupation that can be used as a non-pharmacological intervention to

combat the incidence of depression and improve social participation and quality of life of older adults in long-term-care settings (Kirchen & Hersch, 2015; Shibazaki & Marshall, 2015).

Table 1. Recommendations for Using Music in Occupational Therapy Practice

Performance Skill	Goal (Example)	Music-Related Intervention
Standing endurance	Client will increase standing endurance from 2 to 5 minutes to improve the ability to safely stand and groom at the bathroom sink.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage the client to stand and sing his or her favorite song - Document the length of time the client is able to stand - Measure client-perceived level of exertion (pre- and post-standing)
Fine and gross motor control	<p>Client will increase fine motor control to dial 911, if needed, to ensure safety when discharged home.</p> <p>Client will increase bilateral upper extremity shoulder flexion to 120° to increase the ability to perform upper body dressing with modified independence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage using simple or complex instruments, such as piano or keyboard, to play along with the music of choice - Organize participation in group-based movement/dance moves to music - Teach client to use a cell phone or MP3 player to listen to music
Cognitive sequencing, short- and long-term memory	Client will demonstrate the ability to follow three-step directions to safely prepare a simple meal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recall the words of a song from years past or words from a song newly learned - Play "Name that tune"— Play several notes of a familiar song and ask the client to identify the song
Dynamic sitting balance	Client will increase sitting balance from Fair to Good to maintain an upright posture while seated on a shower bench.	- Have client maintain sitting balance while participating in movement-related activities to music or playing a desired instrument
Core strengthening	Client will improve core strength to maintain a functional upright posture while self-propelling a wheelchair from their room to the dining room.	- Have client use a therapy ball to facilitate functional seated posture while singing or moving to music
Social participation	Client will initiate a conversation with another client at least twice during a 60-minute, group-based intervention to increase social participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize group-based singing or dancing sessions - Encourage clients to select music and reminisce about particular songs

Occupational therapists can embed client goals into music-related activities (occupation as means). For example, a client who is working on standing balance and global endurance may be willing to stand to sing her favorite version of *Amazing Grace*, or a client working on cognitive goals may benefit from a game of *Name That Tune* (several notes or lines of a song are played and the patient attempts remember the name of the song). Music can be effective in promoting occupation as an end, also. For example, a client who wants to learn to play *Happy Birthday* on the piano for his daughter's

birthday, or the client who wants to be able to stand for 30 minutes in order to sing in the church choir. Clients who find music to be meaningful and purposeful will benefit from the use of a music-related occupational therapy approach. Occupational therapists who use music as either an occupation-based means or an end in treatment differ from music therapists because we ensure our approach is skilled (i.e., the treatment intervention addresses the client's occupational therapy goals in a meaningful, purposeful and client-centered manner).

The Group-Based Music Intervention

During fall 2016 at James Madison University's Master of Occupational Therapy Program, we facilitated a group-based music intervention with older adults from a local skilled nursing facility. This intervention was part of a research study conducted to fulfill a graduation requirement, and sought to determine whether participation in a group-based music intervention would decrease depression among long-term care residents. The participants, based on their expressed interest in music, were recruited by the activities department. Four participants were included in the study based on a cognitive screen; however, all other residents who were interested in attending the music groups were encouraged to do so. We administered the Geriatric Depression Scale (Kieffer & Reese, 2002) as a pre- and post-test measure. In addition, we captured the lived experience of the participants by conducting a post-intervention participant survey. All four participants either had a diagnosis of depression or scored within the depression range on the pre-test.

For 5 weeks, the group met weekly in the facility's activity room for 45 minutes. Each session consisted of music in various formats. We began each group with a welcome or conversation period to connect with the residents through open discussion. Our music-centered activities consisted of watching and singing along to YouTube videos and singing as one of us played the guitar. We provided enlarged print lyric sheets for all songs to ensure maximum participation from our group members.

We structured the group based on the Occupational Adaptation Model, which was founded on the fundamental belief that individuals are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to participate in meaningful occupations (Schkade & Schultz, 1992).

Deteriorating physical or cognitive health because of aging can disrupt a person's occupational performance. The participants were no longer able to safely care for themselves within their home, and as a result, they had relocated to long-term care. The transition to this new environment, coupled with decreased functional performance, affected their ability to access music in the same manner as they had within their home environment. Music, for our participants, was a valued occupation and the music-based intervention was intrinsically motivating for them, as evidenced by their willingness to participate in the group, and as indicated by their responses on the post-intervention survey. We facilitated participant occupational engagement in a group-based music intervention, and as a result, empowered participants to make choices about the songs selected and the method in which the music was performed.

The most essential element of our program for enhancing quality of life through engaging in music activities was using participant-selected music. At the end of each

session, we asked for suggestions from all our attendees as to what music they would like to hear and/or sing the following week.

The power of music as a therapeutic media was clearly demonstrated by the rapid growth of our music group during its 5-week implementation. At the beginning of the program, we had only four dedicated group participants as well as a couple of other residents who had heard about our group and were interested in attending. By the next week, our group size doubled. For our final session, we had multiple individuals listening in from the hallway because we could not accommodate the 25 to 30 attendees in the activities room.

Post-Intervention Outcomes

Descriptive data analysis of the pre and post-tests (Geriatric Depression Scale) revealed a trend toward significance, but it lacked impact because of the small sample size. As a result, we relied more heavily on the qualitative data to capture the lived experiences of our participants. We sought to understand the impact that the group-based music intervention had on their quality of life.

Participant Themes

We conducted participant interviews after the final session of the music program. We coded their responses, resulting in the emergence of three main themes: occupation, socialization, and positive emotions.

Music as Occupation

The participants communicated that their participation in music-related activities, such as singing or listening, was an occupation. One participant said, "I sang when I was a little kid," which indicated engaging in music as a valued occupation throughout the life span. Another participant expressed that they used to "listen to music all of the time."

Music Instigating Socialization

Participants demonstrated appreciation for interacting with other individuals during the music group experience. Under the overarching theme of socialization, we also identified subthemes from the interview responses: participant interaction, student interaction, and a sense of belonging. When asked what they took away from the music experience, one participant answered, "The enjoyment of the music and the time spent with the whole group."

The music group also gave the participants the opportunity to connect with us as the students facilitating the group. "It just amazed me ... how much the music meant to you students," said one participant. Another participant reported experiencing a sense of belonging by saying that the music group "makes you feel a part of something."

Music Creating Positive Emotions

Throughout the intervention, this theme of positive emotional experiences repeatedly emerged. Based on our observations of the participants' behavior and affect, positive emotions seemed to increase over time as the music program progressed. All the participants expressed experiencing positive emotions as a result of the music group sessions. The following sub-themes emerged related to positive emotions: enjoyment, pleasure, and peace of mind. One participant said, "I loved the music and always looked

forward to being there.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying, “I enjoyed the whole music group.”

Clinical Implications

In addition to addressing client quality of life, social interaction, and affect, music activities can be used as a therapeutic medium. Table 1 on page 20 highlights multiple ways that music-related interventions can be used to creatively address various occupational therapy goals.

Conclusion

The results of data analysis of our group-based music intervention support using music as a therapeutic medium in occupational therapy practice. Depression is a serious issue in long-term care settings (Choi et al., 2008; Green et al., 2017; Kirchen, Hersch & Pickens, 2014; Ulbricht et al., 2017;) and as such, it is essential that therapists incorporate meaningful occupations into the lives of these clients. Music is a meaningful occupation that is shared by individuals of all backgrounds and cultures, and it is a common voice by which occupation can be both a means and an end (i.e., the process and the outcome). Clients are motivated to engage in client-centered, meaningful occupations, and incorporating music into occupational therapy intervention, as either a means or an end, can lead to positive client outcomes.

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