

# views

## Play On

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**P**atients receiving treatment for cancer expect to encounter doctors, nurses, treatment therapists, and dietitians during their cancer journey. Few would expect to see a music therapist as part of their treatment experience. At Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare in Tallahassee, Florida, the Music Therapy department has been providing ground-breaking music therapy services to oncology patients and family members for the past 13 years. As one of Florida's largest not-for-profit hospitals, Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare serves ten counties in North Florida and six counties in South Georgia.

Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center is Florida's longest continually accredited comprehensive cancer program in the community hospital category through the Commission on Cancer (CoC). Patients receiving treatment at the cancer center can experience music therapy services in waiting areas, during procedures, and while receiving chemotherapy. Music therapy is provided by a board-certified music therapist implementing techniques individually tailored to reduce anxiety, pain perception, nausea, and emotional distress. This vital service is supported by a partnership with a local university, grants, and donations.

### What's Music Therapy?

Music therapy interventions are tailored to address the physical, cognitive, and emotional needs of oncology patients. Individuals facing a cancer diagnosis and treatment deal with a variety of

symptoms and emotions. Anxiety is common and ranges from slight with minimal effect on the patient to severe with significant effect on the patient. Anxiety in cancer patients can affect pain perception, sleep patterns, emotional stability, and cause nausea and vomiting. Music has been shown to be effective at addressing both the physical and psychological factors associated with cancer treatment.<sup>1</sup> Techniques like live patient-preferred music have produced positive results such as increased relaxation and improvements in mood and quality of life, as well as decreased feelings of depression, fear, and fatigue.<sup>2-5</sup>

### How Do Patients Receive Music Therapy?

Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center offers music therapy in several areas of the facility. For patients receiving chemotherapy infusion, visits to the cancer center can be an all-day affair. These long treatment hours are both mentally and physically draining on patients. Music therapy services in the infusion area range from music and relaxation techniques to song-writing—depending on the needs, desire, and ability of the individual patient. Goals for therapy focus on decreasing pain perception, nausea, and anxiety, and improving patient mood and coping skills. Patients interact with the therapist while receiving their infusion and are encouraged to participate as they desire, including:

- Passive listening
- Sing-along opportunities

- The chance to play an instrument
- Verbal processing of a song or situation.

Something as familiar and relatable as music provides an often-needed distraction and support for the patient.

In 2010 oncology staff and the Music Therapy department initiated a creative solution to a problem they were noticing among patients preparing for and receiving radiation therapy. The issue centered on patient anxiety, claustrophobia, and other fears relating to treatment. Several patients exhibited signs of distress when arriving for CT Simulation prior to receiving their radiation treatment. In some instances, the anxiety was so great that patients stopped treatment altogether.

Our solution: to arrange for a music therapist to be present to play live music during a patient's CT Simulation session to distract and relax the patient. One research study indicated that patients receiving music therapy during their CT Simulation reported significantly less anxiety heading into their first treatment than those receiving standard care with no music.<sup>6</sup>

The cost of music intervention is low and implementation is simple. The therapist plays music in the control room, which is piped into the CT room as the patient's immobilizing device is made and the CT scan completed. The therapist can watch the patient and adjust to any signs of distress, as well as change music tempo to assist with regulating breathing. For patients suffering from claustrophobia, the live music intervention often

helps calm and distract them enough for the therapist to complete the mask-making process and subsequent radiation treatments.

Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center frequently provides live music in waiting areas. While waiting for lab results, or the start of a first treatment, anxiety levels are usually high for both patients and family members. Research studies conducted in both surgical and emergency waiting areas found that live music had a significant positive effect on an individual's anxiety and relaxation levels.<sup>7,8</sup> Therefore, we deemed it appropriate to incorporate this type of intervention in hospital and cancer center waiting areas.

### What Our Patients Say

A few years ago we surveyed a focus group of people who had received music therapy services; 90 percent indicated their enjoyment of the music therapy, 80 percent expressed benefiting from the music therapy, and the remainder of the survey was neutral. Such a simple intervention yielded no negative reactions and only serves to brighten visitors' day.

After receiving music therapy during an infusion treatment, one patient wrote the hospital administration about being in the middle of a long treatment and feeling down both mentally and physically. For this patient, the music therapist showed up at just the right moment to uplift and support her.

We are proud of this innovative, low cost, and non-invasive approach to addressing patient and family needs through the use of live music therapy.

### Our Team


Our Music Therapy department consists of two full-time music therapists, one part-time music therapist, and two full-time interns. These individuals do not limit their services solely to Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center, but see patients throughout the hospital system.

The department is funded partly by a partnership with a local university, Florida State University, which provides funds for one full-time position and one part-time position. The hospital funds



the remaining staff and operational costs through grants and donations.

Music therapy is provided at set times in specific areas each week. During this time, staff refers patients for specific reasons: pain reduction, nausea, anxiety, or emotional needs. Patients can also request to receive music therapy services—although priority is given to individuals referred by staff. Appointments can be made outside of the designated time each week as needed.

With music therapy interventions promoting relaxation, pain reduction, and anxiety reduction, the cost relative to the benefits is low. More and more healthcare facilities are recognizing the benefits of providing complementary therapeutic approaches to treatment, such as music therapy, and implementing programs similar to ours. When treating a patient, keep in mind their physical and emotional needs can affect a patient's overall health and ability to recover. Music therapy assists in managing both physical symptoms and emotional factors relating to cancer treatment. When compared to the cost and side effects of pharmacological solutions to managing these symptoms, music therapy is a viable and sometimes preferable option. What is better than walking into a treatment area and hearing the soothing sounds of a live rendition of your favorite song? Music can soothe, distract, and uplift. 

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