

Mindful Awareness of Music: A Modality for Symptom Management

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Individuals diagnosed with hematologic cancers experience a variety of psychological and physiologic hardships. The purpose of this evidence-based practice pilot project was to determine whether patients who listened to music had improved symptom management. Individuals admitted to an inpatient hematology-oncology unit participated in music sessions. These sessions consisted of patient-preferred music being played for 30–45 minutes. Surveys were administered before and immediately after the intervention. Overall, 58 patients participated. Symptoms that were most improved were tiredness (52%), well-being (48%), drowsiness (45%), and anxiety (41%).

AT A GLANCE

- Mindful awareness of music can be implemented into nursing practice as a symptom management tool for patients with cancer.
- Patient-preferred music can improve patients' physical and psychological symptoms.
- Music can be accessed for supportive care through multiple platforms, devices, and modalities.

KEYWORDS

music; symptom management; well-being; evidence-based practice; supportive care

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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Patients diagnosed with cancer can experience various physical and psychological symptoms throughout survivorship (Bradt et al., 2021). Quality of life strongly correlates with fewer symptoms experienced by patients (Senf et al., 2019). Improvements in symptom management can strengthen patients' quality of life. Encouraging psychosocial interventions, in addition to physical interventions, has the potential to alleviate negative symptoms like anxiety, which, in turn, can improve patient well-being (Merry & Silverman, 2021).

Music has multiple known benefits for individuals diagnosed with various illnesses (Holzmueller, 2021). Using music as a therapeutic intervention has been shown to reduce physiologic and psychological stress while being cost effective (Raglio et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021). When individuals select their desired music, symptoms can be better managed and improved. Patient-preferred music sessions are associated with improvements on the Edmonton Symptom Assessment Scale (ESAS) subscales of global, physical, and psychological distress (Lopez et al., 2019).

Background

This evidence-based practice (EBP) pilot project was part of an inaugural RN fellowship program. Nursing fellows identified an EBP improvement project pertinent to their practice area and were mentored through all stages of developing and implementing the project. The question informing this pilot project was as follows: For inpatients with hematologic cancer diagnoses, how does the implementation of music sessions affect quality of life during hospitalization?

A literature review was conducted to find studies focused on how music affects patient symptoms. The seven studies identified from the review consisted of two randomized controlled trials (Bro et al., 2019; Merry & Silverman, 2021), four qualitative studies (Foster et al., 2014; Liou et al., 2022; Lopez et al., 2019; Lynch et al., 2021), and one systematic review of 29 studies (Sheikh-Wu et al., 2021). Each study included content about music and its effects on patient well-being. Multiple types of music modalities were implemented within the studies. These modalities included live music, passive music, energetic music, and music with imagery. Across a range of music modalities, symptoms were most improved when patient-preferred music was played. This autonomy allowed the patient to select music based on their favored genre (Merry & Silverman, 2021). In the