Music for connection

Findings from a study exploring music therapy with people living with dementia and their care partners across care settings



This research: who, what, how?

14 participants
5 persons living with dementia
4 family members
5 health care professionals

music therapist
professionally trained and registered with Health and Care Professions Council

up to 12 weeks / sessions

up to 1 hour long sessions

- in-person sessions in participants' own homes or in care homes
- both a person living with dementia and their care partner took part
- sessions tailored to each pair's needs and preferences
- music therapist in touch with care partner before and in-between sessions

What is music therapy about?

Therapeutic relationship with the music therapist
Active musical experiences: singing, moving, playing instruments
Receptive musical experiences: listening to music, creating playlists
Creating personalised songbooks with photos, song lyrics and musical scores
Creating personalised playlists using music streaming services/apps
Guidance on incorporating music in daily activities



What has this research told us?

In this study, involving care partners in music therapy helped people find a way to connect, manage stressful activity or simply enjoy being together. Field notes and interviews with participants identified three important themes.

1 Noticing an embodied response

In music therapy, facial expressions, vocalisation, or gentle movement could become meaningful signs of engagement - moments of connection. Music therapists can work with care partners to notice small responses - a look, a glance, a hand finding rhythm - and help find ways of maintaining and developing connection.

2 Emotional and wellbeing effects

Music therapy can help express emotions, reduces agitation and feelings of anger or helplessness – for people living with dementia and for those who love and care for them. Sharing musical experiences stimulated memory and supported communication.

3 Wider application of music

Music therapists can help care partners carry the music into daily routines. Care partners in this study described developing confidence to use music purposefully and strategically – during a difficult afternoon, a care-home visit or a quiet hour together.

This research was funded and supported by:

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration
Newcastle University
Alzheimer's Society
NHS Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

infographic design by www.northernideas.co.uk
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