

It's all about the patients, isn't It?

Collaborative, cohesive, and constructive interactions with therapeutic harpists and board-certified music therapists

by Jocelyn Obermeyer, CHTP, NSBTM Member-at-large

The National Standards Board of Therapeutic Musicians has been working to encourage collaboration and communication between music therapists and certified music practitioners. Jocelyn Obermeyer, CHTP, gives us a glimpse of how the two complement one another.

“Therapeutic music is an art based on the science of sound. It is live acoustic music specifically tailored to the patient’s immediate needs. A therapeutic musician is a graduate of an accredited training program who uses the inherent healing elements of live music and sound to enhance the environment for patients in healthcare settings in order to facilitate the healing process.”

“Music Therapy means the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship. Music therapists develop an individualized music therapy treatment plan for the client that identifies the goals, objectives, and potential strategies of the music therapy services appropriate for the client using music therapy interventions. These interventions may include music improvisation, receptive music listening, song writing, lyric discussion, music and imagery, music performance, learning through music, and movement to music.”

(American Music Therapy Association and the National Standards Board of Therapeutic Musicians, 2015)

"Can you play for the patient on the vent please? Can you visit the baby in 4 please? This facility really enjoys your singing. Can you add them to your schedule please? Can you do this presentation and bring your baby harps? What song would you play for this patient? What note would you play for that one?"

This is the type of interactive, supportive conversation one may hear on any given day among the harpists on the Therapeutic Harp Foundation team. Some of the harpists are music therapists and some are therapeutic musicians. We are fortunate to have both on our team. One of the music therapists, Cindy Steen, MT-BC, M.M. Clinical Music Therapy, is graduating from the International Harp Therapy Program and will be certified as a therapeutic musician, as well. Cindy encourages board-certified music therapists and therapeutic musicians to support each other’s unique goals because “when words fail, music speaks.” Danielle Franklin, works in hospice and our non-research facilities. She is a board-certified music therapist with a master’s degree, and in addition, holds many professional certifications. Danielle, who earned her degree from Arizona State University, states, “Department chairs and program directors of certification programs have worked as professional partners for many years.”

We all understand how to work together because we all understand the scope of our work. We carry one major philosophy as well ... the more music for the patients, families and staff ... the better! Why would we ever want to limit the healing power of the music?

One very collaborative project the Therapeutic Harp Foundation is involved with is The Heart Beat Project. We just started gathering information from patients on June 14, 2018; however, we have been working closely with our principal investigator partners Dr. Holly L. Geyer, M.D., and Dr. Kenneth J. Mishark, Consultant - Department of Internal Medicine, Mayo Clinic Hospital for over a year. Our partners for this project, chaired by associate professor Melita Belgrave, are Mayo Clinic Hospital in Scottsdale, Ariz. and the Arizona State University Music Therapy Department in Tempe, Ariz. Music therapists from ASU and Jocelyn Obermeyer, CTHP, will be the musicians on this project. We will be recording in the ASU Music Therapy Lab. All partners have brought funding to this project. In a future article, we will share the process, timeline, objectives and outcomes with you.

On my monthly visit to a long-term care facility, I was greeted by the life enrichment coordinator (whom I was just meeting for the first time) and the music therapist. I knew this facility had hired a music therapist and I was very excited to meet her. The life enrichment coordinator wanted pictures of me playing my harp and assigned that task to Ione Murray, MT-BC, who had received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Western Michigan University. Ione escorted me to the dining room and as I was playing, she took some pictures. She asked me if I was a MT and I said "No, I am a TM." I asked, "Do you know this field?" And she replied, "Yes." I continued playing and singing and I heard this sweet, clear harmony ever so gently singing along. I asked Ione to name some of her favorite songs and we ended up giving an impromptu 40-minute music session to the lovely folks! Her most favorite song is "Over the Rainbow," so I played the harp and she sang a solo. The crowd went crazy! I then explained to the group that we just met and never rehearsed anything we were doing together. I also explained that I was their therapeutic musician that visited once a month and Ione is their music therapist that is there every day! We both acknowledged that we are absolutely great together and we plan on partnering in the future.

Relationship building and creative partnering bring a richer experience for the patients, families and staff. Isn't that our ultimate offering?