The Effect of Music Therapy in Palliative Care

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Abstract
Palliative care is defined as an approach that improves the quality of life of both patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual” [1]. While music therapy has been used for over 30 years in palliative care, evidence-based practices are very limited [2-6].

There are few studies regarding the effects of music therapy in palliative care. In a randomized controlled trial in terminally ill patients undergoing palliative care, Warth et al. [2] found that music therapy (live music-based relaxation exercises) was more effective than the control group treatment (a verbal relaxation exercise) in both promoting relaxation and well-being. Interestingly, their results showed that there was a significantly greater increase in high-frequency oscillations of the heart rate, as well as a reduction in fatigue in the intervention group compared with the control group. However, there was not a significant difference between the groups with regard to pain level [2]. In a study, the use of music-vigils in palliative care resulted in a slight reduction in pain and modest improvement in breathing and sleep patterns, relaxation and comfort in patients. Family members reported that the vigil had almost no adverse effect on patients [3].

On the other hand, in an another randomized controlled trial in hospitalized adult patients with cancer, Arruda, and Garcia [4] suggested that both music and poetry were effective for improving pain and depression. They have also indicated that while music therapy had no significant effect on hope in patients with cancer, poetry promoted hope [4]. In a systematic review, McConnell, Scott and Porter [5] also noted that music therapy may be effective to reduce pain among adult patients in palliative care settings. Furthermore, a recent study examined the trajectories of cardiovascular response to receptive music therapy in terminally ill patients undergoing palliative care and reported that “music therapy caused significantly stronger reductions of vascular sympathetic tone and, therefore, may be indicated in the treatment of pain and stress-related symptoms in palliative care” [6]. As a result, the effect of music therapy in palliative care has been assessed in a limited number of studies with inconsistent results. Further research is needed to better understand the effect of music therapy on the body during palliative care [2-6].

References

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