

MUSIC THERAPY HELPS PUT SICK PEOPLE BACK IN TUNE WITH LIFE 2B

IN PERFECT HARMONY

How music is used to ease the pains of life



DR DENA Register from the University of Kansas, USA demonstrates music therapy techniques to nurses, therapists and other interested participants during the music therapy workshop held recently at Mahidol University.

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Mon and his mother arrive at the clinic for his weekly physical therapy and occupational therapy appointment. Diagnosed at birth with spastic cerebral palsy, Mon, now three and a half, is a happy, bright child trapped in a body that has not physically developed in a way typical of children his age. His ability to speak is severely delayed along with his ability to sit up unassisted, to walk and to have stable control over his arms and hands.

Despite these challenges Mon is usually smiling and is very compliant with

his caregivers, though the treatments obviously tire him. But Mon's doctors and his mother persist, aware that the more intervention Mon receives as a young child, the better his prognosis is for acquiring activities of daily living that are consistent with typical development.

Today, Mon begins with physical therapy. He lies on his back while the physical therapist moves each of his legs up and down several times in order to help stretch his muscles and increase his range of motion. Mon, as usual, is quiet and seems content.

Then a new therapist enters the room, loaded down with a guitar, an iPod and speaker system, and a bag full of instruments. The newcomer pulls out a large

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drum and places it at Mon's foot so that his foot hits the drum and makes a sound when his leg is fully extended. Mon gives a huge smile and a little laugh. As soon as he realises that that by fully extending his leg, he can make a sound on the drum, he moves his leg without the assistance of the physical therapist. The music therapist continues to hold the drum and adds singing-"Stomp, stomp, stomp on the drum"- in time with Mon's playing. After several minutes of playing with his feet by doing leg extensions, Mon wants to sit up and play the drum with his hands. The music therapist accompanies Mon's drumming and uses singing to prompt both loud and quiet sounds, stopping and starting, playing quickly and slowly. Not only is Mon motivated to do all these movements without any assistance, he is also working on the cognitive skills necessary to respond to one and two step directions and the muscle building that will help him sustain physical activity for longer periods of time. On this day, Mon's session lasts for more than one hour as he sings, plays instruments and moves to the music. Music therapy will change Mon's development, his functionality and, ultimately, his quality of life.

Music therapy is the systematic use of musical elements, such as rhythm, tempo, and form to achieve non-music goals. In the case of Mon, the music therapist will design music interventions in

cooperation with Mon's doctor, physical and occupational therapist in order to help him reach physical, cognitive, social and emotional goals. The music therapist is a trained musician who also has coursework or training in healthcare, special education and psychology. It is this comprehensive educational and clinical background and the cooperation with the rest of the treatment team that distinguishes music therapy as a viable treatment option that combines both science and art. Music therapy has the capability to help patients regardless of their age or ability level and the patient does not need to have any musical training or experience. In music therapy, both live and recorded music are used to bring people together, to communicate, to share and to grow. Sometimes patients or clients are treated in individual settings and sometimes services are provided in a group.

A recognised discipline in many countries, including the US, with trained professionals at degree level, music therapy has now come to Thailand via Mahidol University's College of Music, which recently launched a Music Therapy department. This June, the College of Music will open a Music Therapy Master's degree Master's degree programme and training course. Prior to the start of the programme, the college is offering a three-day, 20-hour workshop that provides information on the thera-

peutic uses of music. This workshop is designed as a continuing education opportunity for health and education-related professions as well as students, and provides basic information and interactive experiences that demonstrate the potential outcomes for patients and families that participate in music therapy.

More than 100 individuals from across Thailand have come to the Salaya campus of Mahidol University in order to participate in the training. The participants return to their various work settings after the training and advocate for and implement therapeutic music interventions with their own clients.

In addition to the training, the staff of the music therapy department at the College of Music go into various clinical sites around the Bangkok-area and provide music therapy services to both children and adults in medical, rehabilitation and educational settings. They work with clients on cognitive skills, physical skills, social-relational issues, psychological and emotional issues and communication.

The College of Music was recently awarded Bt18 million for music therapy research. This funding will provide the resources to help thousands of clients and their families reach functional goals in their treatment, contribute to society and also maintain or increase their quality of life.