



Perfect harmony

Using music to ease the pains of life

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Mon and his mother arrive at the clinic for his weekly physical and occupational therapy appointment. Now three-and-a-half-years-old, Mon suffers from spastic cerebral palsy and has spent more hours of his life in doctors' offices and medical clinics than some people do in 20 years.

He 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 all of these challenges Mon is usually smiling and is very compliant

with his caregivers. He allows his body to be pinched and prodded through medical exams and therapy interventions, working on muscle control and verbal responses. The whole process leaves him tired and grumpy by midday and some days he is only able to participate in physical and occupational therapy for 30 to 45 minutes before the exhaustion



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sets in.

Regardless, Mon's doctors and his mother persist with treatments knowing that the more intervention Mon receives as a youngster, the better his prognosis is for acquiring activities of daily living that are consistent with typical development. The more skills Mon acquires, the better his quality of life.

On this particular day, 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. His mother sits by his side watching as Mon allows the therapist to work his muscles, showing no signs of motivation to do the physical work unassisted. The room

smiles. Today is different.

A new therapist enters the room, loaded down with a guitar, an iPod and speaker system, and a bag full of instruments. After observing for a few minutes, the newcomer pulls out a large drum and places it next to one of Mon's feet so that his foot hits the drum and makes a sound when his leg is fully extended. The result from Mon is a huge smile and a little laugh.

Once Mon realises that by fully extending his leg he can make a sound on the drum, he begins to move his leg without the assistance of the physical therapist. The music therapist continues holding the drum and then sings the words "Stomp, stomp, stomp on the drum" in time with Mon's playing.

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 will last for more than one hour as he sings, plays instruments and moves to the music. Music therapy will change his 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-musical goals. In the case of Mon, the music therapist, a trained musician who also



and emotional goals. 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, which combines science and art.

Music therapy can help patients regardless of their age or ability level and the patient doesn't need to have any musical training or experience. In music therapy, we use both live and recorded music 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.

Music therapy is a well-established profession in many countries, including the US, with more than 60 years of history in clinical training and research, as well as degree programmes that award bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in music therapy. It is this legacy that has piqued the interest of administrators at Mahidol University's College of Music and prompted them to open a department of music therapy at the college's Salaya campus in June this year.

Though the degree programme has not yet begun, the college is offering a three-day, 20-hour workshop on the "Therapeutic Uses of Music". This workshop, designed as a continuing education opportunity for those in health and

education-related professions, as well as students, has already attracted more than 100 participants from all across the country. Returning to their various work settings, they later advocate for or implement therapeutic music interventions with their own clients.

In addition to running this workshop, staff from the music therapy department visit various places around Bangkok to provide music therapy to children and adults in medical, rehabilitation and educational settings. They work with clients on cognitive skills, physical skills, social-relational issues, psychological/emotional issues and communication. Apart from pioneering the profession of music therapy in this country, staff from the music therapy department are also engaged in research studies related to patient and family progress and outcomes resulting from music therapy.