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Using Music in Dementia Care



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Abstract

This paper presents a summary of the initial findings from a research project carried out between January 2014 and November 2015. In the UK, the work was carried out in association with the Charity 'Music in Hospitals', whilst in Japan, the research was arranged through independent musicians with significant experience in providing music concerts in care facilities. In total, 30 concerts were included in the project which took place in a total of 6 care facilities; 3 in Japan and 3 in the UK. The research method involved a series of interviews with service users, service providers and their family members as well as both open and systematic observations of clients' responses to musical elements. Initial results suggest that musical events can be a worthwhile and important non-pharmacological intervention in promoting wellbeing. In this paper, we argue that music can play a significant role in improving the care of the elderly and in particular those with early to mid stage dementia as well as providing significant benefits for their family members and their service providers.

Introduction

By the time the reader arrives at this point in the paper, it is estimated that worldwide, another 5 people will have been diagnosed as having some form of dementia (Hunt, 2013). In 2012, there were 4,620,000 people over 65 years of age living with dementia in Japan; a figure that represented 3.6% of the total population and in January 2015, the Japanese Government estimated that the number of people with dementia is expected to increase to over 7,000,000 by 2025; a figure that represents one in five people over the age of 65. As a result, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare implemented the 'Orange Plan' in order to provide an environment for those living with dementia in which they can continue to live within their own familiar and local community as well as being respected. Similarly in the UK, the Government was driven to launch the 'Dementia Challenge' with the aim of funding research to ensure that England becomes "*the best country in the world for dementia care and support and for people with dementia, their carers and families to live; and the best place in the world to undertake research into dementia*" (Department of Health, 2012).

As dementia progresses, various mental abilities gradually diminish and the individual can start to become more distant and increasingly incapable of carrying out even the most basic everyday tasks. However, previous studies have suggested that musical skills are amongst the last to disappear (Davidson and Almeida, 2014; Okabe & Kobayashi, 2006; Sixsmith and Gibson, 2007; Yamada & Baba, 2008) and recently, the lack of appropriate medication for the treatment of dementia and associated conditions, (Banerjee, 2013; Press and Alexander, 2013; Petrovsky et al., 2015), the increasing cost of care for those living with dementia and the relatively low costs associated with the provision of arts activities (Bellelli et al., 2012), has contributed to an increased interest in non pharmacological interventions. Certainly, the positive effects of using music with those living with dementia is well documented (McDermott, Crellin, Ridder & Orrell, 2013; Sixsmith & Gibson, 2007; Sung, H.C., et al., 2012) and the significant benefits achieved through music therapy has received similar attention (Aldridge, 2000; Ridder & Aldridge, 2005; Spiro, 2010).

In particular, the use of live music has been shown to have not only beneficial effects for clients and their families but can also bring about overall improvements to the level of care that clients receive (Camic, Williams & Meeten, 2011; Osman, Tischler, & Schneider, 2014). However, as relatively few

studies have also explored the impact of musical interventions on all those involved in dementia care (McDermott et al., 2014) our study aimed to explore the effect of the musical concerts on those living with dementia, the care staff working within the facility and also their families.

Research method

In total, 30 concerts were included in the current study with 11 concerts taking place in 3 different care facilities in Japan and a total of 19 concerts in 3 care facilities in the UK. Interviews were carried out with 33 clients with dementia, 15 family members and 9 members of the nursing staff. All musical events involved one or two musicians and took place within a communal area of the care facility. All concerts lasted for approximately one hour and the repertoire in both countries included both instrumental listening music, as well as familiar songs to join in with. All concerts took place during the afternoon between 2 and 4 and all musicians were professionals with significant levels of experience in performing in care facilities. Interviews were held within the same communal area following the musical event and all were recorded either digitally or in field notes. In addition to interviews, both open and systematic observations of residents were carried out. Open observations of responses and behaviours were recorded in field notes. A number of participants were video recorded and systematic observations of their responses and behaviours were carried out post event. Ethical approval for the research was given by the UK university. Consent was gained from clients and also from family members. All video recorded data was transferred to disc and copies sent to family members prior to any analysis taking place, in order to gain permission for use - a feature which later proved to be an added benefit for some families.

Results

Interview and field note data was analysed according to standard qualitative procedures in that responses were first tabulated on summative sheets from which the main themes could then be identified. In the following section, we provide a summary of the main findings but a more comprehensive and extensive account of the research findings can be found in the research conducted by Shibasaki and Marshall (2015). Overall, we noted significant benefits to service users, service providers and families and a summary of the main findings are presented accordingly.

Effects on service users

The main benefits for service users included:

- Increased levels of feeling included were reported amongst those with dementia who also had some level of visual impairment. For clients in this category, musical events were one of the few activities in which they could take part and enjoy on their own terms without feeling they were impacting on the enjoyment of others by requiring special treatment or in any way hindering the activity.
- Individuals with dementia and also limited mobility or recovering from stroke often became increasingly agitated or in some instances slightly aggressive when required to work with a physiotherapist. However, participants included in this category were frequently seen to be animated and 'exercising' by moving in time to the music throughout the full hour in which the concert took place.

- For those with early to mid stage dementia, individual songs and tunes often prompted memories, many of which had not been heard previously by their families.
- Similarly, expressions of musical taste were identifiable even amongst those with quite advanced dementia. Expressions of preference included singing, increased eye contact with performers or increased levels of attention, decreased levels of negative behaviours and tapping / moving in time to the music. Expressions of tolerance included increased levels of attention but no direct interaction with the music and decreased levels of negative behaviours (absence of shouting, rocking or wandering / trying to leave). Expressions of dislike included banging books, covering ears and shouting.
- Social interaction and conversations with other clients also increased beyond the duration of the concert and this was noted as being specifically beneficial for male clients. Staff commented for example, on the fact that whilst female clients were always happy to interact and converse, many male clients often found this more difficult. However, the music was seen as an effective catalyst for encouraging male clients to communicate more with each other.

One significant issue arising from this was to note that in some instances, simply sitting silently, not interacting and remaining within the performance space was the best indicator of the positive benefit of the music in that this neutral behaviour replaced more usual negative or anti social behaviours.

Observations of individuals, some with quite advanced stages of dementia and limited communication, also indicated significant levels of musical knowledge and cognitive ability. Clients with quite advanced stages of dementia still appeared to be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge of the accepted rules of music
- Understand, respond to and predict changes in tempo and dynamic
- Demonstrate a knowledge of the difference between a beat and a rhythm
- Anticipate and understand humour in music or in songs
- Use movement to portray objects, concepts or emotions in songs
- Exhibit their musical preferences

Video evidence also revealed the positive benefits of using music as a means of managing pain. For example, in one case where the individual had received their maximum amount of prescribed analgesic and who at the start of the concert was totally withdrawn, non-responsive, inattentive and focussed totally on holding and massaging the source of the pain, was slowly seen to open up, become attentive, interact with others, sing and respond to humour.



Effects on service providers

Interviews with staff indicated a number of benefits gained from the presence of the music concerts.

- The first comment nearly always related to how the concerts ‘lifted the whole place’. Staff members commented on how the music had far reaching effects which could lift the mood “sometimes for days”.
- Staff who did not or could not attend still benefitted from the concert as the music tended to ‘spread throughout the facility’. Throughout the research, other staff who could not attend the actual concert could still be seen in other parts of the building joining in or heard singing songs from the programme after the concert had finished.
- Staff also noticed that clients were more relaxed and cooperative following the music and interactions with nursing staff became more positive with a corresponding increase in the overall level of nursing.
- Some staff reported that they saved difficult aspects of their job for times when the music was present; something that made the task appear easier or reduced the level of negative emotion associated with the task. One example was a staff member who had to sort out the possessions of clients who had passed away.
- Concerts enabled staff to see clients in new ways.
- The music concerts were seen as increasing motivation, boosting morale and increasing job satisfaction.

Nursing staff also commented on the increased opportunities for assessment of the overall physical condition of some clients which their participation in music facilitated. Changes in levels of coordination, balance, breathing, levels of emotional wellbeing, resilience and stamina were given as examples of the physical abilities which were more assessable throughout the concerts.

Effects for family members

Interviews with family members produced a number of further interesting results including:

- Lasting memories of their parent / partner enjoying the concert, especially when in some instances this was a final memory. This was especially common / popular amongst family members who had to travel some distance and could only make a limited number of visits.
- Music concerts were reported as having the ability to promote new memories, many of which had not been heard previously but gave a sense of the true personality which often, the dementia had overshadowed.
- Family members also made reference to increased bonding, shared experiences and levels of communication.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a brief summary of the initial findings for our current study which is continuing to explore the impact and both the positive and negative effects that providing music in care facilities can have on those who live with dementia, their care givers and families. In conclusion, we argue that the results have both extended and confirmed many of the findings from previous work

and we therefore fully support the claim that live music concerts can produce a wide range of positive benefits for the overall wellbeing of those living with dementia.

Shortly before this paper was completed, we received an email. The communication came from a lady who had given permission for us to video record her parent. Having received the copy of the video material she wrote to thank us. Recently her parent had been ill and suffered a small stroke which had limited their ability to speak. The video showed the parent joining in with a number of songs and had been taken over a period of weeks. The progress made by the parent in terms of regaining the ability to speak was strikingly demonstrated in the video. Over the weeks represented in the video, the daughter was able to see improved breathing, an ability to hold notes for longer, an ability to sing gradually at a faster tempo and an ability to include all the words correctly and also, and most importantly, progress in her ability to smile.

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