



MIND

# Banding Together through Cancer with Music Therapy

Music therapy can help cancer patients express themselves, reduce stress and lessen anxiety.

By Erin Brereton



Patients don't need to know how to play an instrument to participate in the Music Therapy program currently offered at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) at Southwestern Regional Medical Center (Southwestern) in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

They don't even need to be musically inclined, according to [Dr. David Wakefield](#), PhD, mind-body therapist at Southwestern.

"Some patients are concerned about being asked to participate," Wakefield says. "I tell them Music Therapy is fun!"

Wakefield was inspired to add a music-based program after seeing how effective a similar one had been at a hospital where he'd previously worked.

The CTCA® program, which is offered in conjunction with Oral Roberts University (ORU) also located in Tulsa, was launched in 2016. Approximately 200 patients and caregivers have since participated.

## Stress-Reducing Jam Sessions

In past year, the CTCA Music Therapy program involved two types of sessions: weekly group gatherings, held on Thursdays in the fall with typically six to eight participants, and individual bedside sessions conducted in the spring.

Both are designed and led by two junior-level ORU undergraduate students who are pursuing music therapy degrees.

The students' professor, Dr. Hayoung A. Lim, PhD, MT-BC, director of the [Music Therapy](#) Program and Clinic and a professor of music at ORU, also attends each session and supervises their work.

The therapy classes may involve improvising music, singing, music-focused relaxation and other exercises, including participating in a drum circle or taking part in a percussion ensemble.

Participants use bells, small drums, xylophones, tambourines and other hand-held musical instruments, provided by the ORU Music Therapy Clinic, in the activities

After each class, the ORU students and their professor use input from a survey participants fill out that is used exclusively to plan the next session. The undergrad students also complete a session evaluation to record patient evaluations and progress.

"Our students administer pre- and post-tests, before and after each music therapy session, for patients' pain perception, fatigue level and affect change," Lim says. "Preliminary survey results are encouraging."

## A Chance for Interaction and Expression

Lim says two aspects of the program, song lyric analysis and song writing—filling in the blanks in a song with patients' lyrics—have been particularly popular with patients and caregivers. Both helped provide them with beneficial coping skills.

Healthcare providers are also utilizing music therapy, according to Lim, to address a number of other concerns.

"Music therapy techniques have been used in treating various neurologic disorders including stroke, Parkinson's disease, traumatic brain injuries and dementia," she says. "It's also used to treat neuro-developmental disorders that include autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy and other developmental/perceptual disorders."

For patients at Southwestern, the classes, which are part of the integrative care approach CTCA offers, can serve as an extremely therapeutic outlet, according to Wakefield.

"Music Therapy is a great positive distraction from all that is involved in a diagnosis of cancer, cancer treatment and the side effects of treatment," he says. "It's a great place to meet others and socialize. I have seen a positive effect in patients' moods—and a lot more smiles."

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