Music has soothed the souls of human beings for ages. It also has helped people recover from ailments since ancient times. Today, there is a widespread interest in the use of music therapy in treating psychiatric disorders. This article describes the various types of music therapy in use today and also offers insight into how music therapy can be incorporated into the management of psychiatric disorders and as an element of psychotherapy. (Altern Ther Health Med. 2004. 11 (6); [TK].)

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Music is an ancient art that has soothed minds for centuries. Music helps people regain inner peace and is the voice that binds people together. It has been used to treat the sick since ancient times and frequently is used to cure depression. Songs offer people solace in adversity and joy in prosperity. They are sung on birthdays and even at the death of a loved one. Music is accepted as a universal means to express one's emotions. It was an essential component of ancient healing. A drum was beaten when treatment was offered to a patient, and a successful recovery was announced with trumpets. Great philosophers have assigned important roles to music in the expression of their emotions and teachings. [Author: Please provide a reference for the previous statement.] Music was used to treat psychiatric illness in ancient Greek and Roman cultures.

More recently, reports have indicated the usefulness of music therapy in managing psychiatric disorders. Music has been used in psychosis and neurosis and now is being used in addressing organic disorders such as dementia. There is a wealth of literature on music therapy in all fields, but sadly, renowned psychiatry textbooks fail to mention music therapy as a treatment modality, and many contain no information about it at all. The purpose of this article is to offer insight into the various types of music therapy and review some of the literature on the use of music therapy in psychiatry.

BACKGROUND MUSIC THERAPY

Background music therapy is a form of therapy in which music is heard for fixed hours as part of the hospital routine. [Author: Is the music played non-stop, or for a fixed number of hours each day?] It is transmitted via audiotapes and radio. The aim of this therapy is to create a calm environment amid the chaos in the hospital. This plays a useful role in allaying anxiety and relaxing patients in critical care.

Contemplative Music Therapy

Contemplative music therapy helps patients appreciate the significance of music and art in general. Before music is played for patients, they are given a biography of the composer and other details about the music. This therapy also aims at soothing agitation and alleviating sadness.

Combined music therapy

In combined music therapy, music therapy is used in conjunction with other therapeutic procedures. Unlike background music therapy, it calls for the patient to select musical composi-
tions that enhance therapeutic outcome [Author: How would the patient know which compositions enhance therapeutic outcome?] and suit the patient. Sometimes in this form of music therapy, hypnosis is conducted while the subject listens to the music. This music is often accompanied by suggestion under hypnosis that improves the therapeutic outcome. This form of music therapy has been used in combination with cerebral electrosleep therapy and behaviour therapy methods like autogenic training.

Executive Music Therapy

Executive music therapy consists of individual or group singing and playing musical instruments. Patients with long hospital stays are the best candidates for this form of therapy. It strengthens patients’ self-confidence and their feelings of worth among others. Executive music therapy can be incorporated into the occupational therapy routine. [Author: Please provide some references on executive music therapy.]

Executive Iatromusic

In executive iatromusic therapy, a musician performs in children’s psychiatric units. This form of therapy frequently is used in managing emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, and dyslexic children. 8

Creative Music Therapy

In creative music therapy, patients write songs, compose music, and play instruments as a form of catharsis. Grief over a deceased loved one, oppression, and repressed feelings and fears often are well expressed in music and song. [Author: Please provide references for this section.]

The Use of Music Therapy in Psychiatric Disorders

Music therapy has been used effectively in both adults and children with psychiatric disorders. It has been used to modify the behaviour of children with autism and pervasive developmental disorders with moderate success. 11 It has been used to reduce agitation in patients with dementia by soothing them and eliminating the social isolation of these patients. 12-13 Music therapy has been used in patients with Parkinson’s disease to improve motor skills and emotional problems. 14,15 There is ample evidence of the usefulness of music therapy in alleviating grief and in combating bouts of depression. 16-18

CONCLUSIONS

Music no doubt plays a pivotal role in the lives of human beings. Incorporating music therapy into regular therapy programs for psychiatric disorders can help speed recovery and also help make therapy a more positive experience. Music therapy is a valuable but relatively unexplored asset in the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy.

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