

Hitting a New Note in Cancer Care Support

by Leanne Flask



Well before Larry Carter received his lung cancer diagnosis, he had already witnessed the role therapeutic music can play in healing the body, mind, and spirit. Larry, activity director for the Victoria Nursing & Rehab Center in Victoria, TX, with 86 people in his care, was an early adopter of therapeutic music delivered through web-enabled devices. He's seen people connect and light up with old memories, relax and be comforted by the music, and even be inspired to get up and start dancing around the room.

Now, Larry is tapping the power of therapeutic music for himself while undergoing chemotherapy. And he is able to do so with his own smartphone whenever he needs inspiration, support, and healing.

"I listen to gospel music," Larry says. "I find the music comforting and relaxing. The music inspires me and supports my faith."

Larry's incorporation of therapeutic music into his own cancer care support program is part of a growing trend. The healthcare community has become increasingly aware of the power of music to support people undergoing cancer treatment. Research cited by the American Cancer Society indicates that music has been shown to do everything from reduce high blood pressure and lower rapid heart rate to provide relief for depression and anxiety.

We all have music we enjoy listening to, but therapeutic music stands in sharp contrast to the selection of music available on the radio. Rather, therapeutic music consists of programs thoughtfully

built by a team of music therapists, designers, and neuroscientists.

While this has traditionally been prohibitively expensive in most cancer care settings, a number of survivors and support teams are discovering that mobile devices now make it easy to access music designed specifically for cancer support.

There are three basic components to consider when tapping the power of therapeutic music: tempo, musical texture, and level of familiarity.

Music has been shown to do everything from reduce high blood pressure and lower rapid heart rate to provide relief for depression and anxiety.

Tempo You know what tempo is if you've ever caught yourself tapping your foot to the beat of a song, though you may not realize the various ways tempo in music can affect your well-being. An up-tempo song accelerates breathing and can have a chain reaction, increasing heart rate, muscle tension, pulse rate, and adrenaline. By selecting slower tempos, you trigger the relaxation response, which can help support your immune system while you're undergoing chemotherapy or radiation treatments.

Music with a strong beat can also stimulate your brainwaves to resonate in sync with the beat. Faster beats elicit sharper concentration and alertness, and a slower beat promotes a calm, meditative state.

Musical Texture Texture in its basic form refers to whether a song's composition is simple or complex. For example, simplicity is found in a single voice and a single guitar, whereas a 12-piece jazz band would be considered complex. When there is a lot going on in a song (complex texture), the brain has to work harder to process the sound. Listening to music with complex textures can complicate "chemo brain" episodes and cause additional confusion for



Leanne Flask

survivors, whereas listening to music with simpler textures can minimize agitation and confusion.

Level of Familiarity Like Larry's selection of gospel music, listening to familiar styles of music can engage you on emotional and cognitive levels. You can tap into music that is familiar to you to increase comfort, reduce depression, and minimize anxiety.

Leanne Flask is chief content officer of Coro Health, LLC, a new media healthcare company. Coro Health's MusicFirst: Oncology is a clinically proven therapeutic music app for mobile devices that allows survivors to access customized therapeutic music programs in oncology settings. The MusicFirst: Oncology app is available in the iTunes App Store or at CoroHealth.com.