



Testing The Power Of Music-Making

A study demonstrates the efficacy of recreational music-making as a means of inspiring creativity and helping long term care residents bond.

WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL expression, group support, and quality-of-life enhancement, recreational music-making (RMM) (*see box, this page*) has great potential for engaging seniors in enjoyable, empowering, group-based activities that reduce loneliness, while building self-esteem, creative expression, and mutual support.

To test these contentions, two real-world laboratories were established at Wesbury United Methodist Retirement Community, Meadville, Pa., a facility with independent living, skilled nursing, assisted living, and memory support (skilled and assisted); and Fredericka Manor, Chula Vista, Calif., a retirement campus with independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing, including 60 beds for persons with dementia.

While ongoing RMM programs are currently offered at both facilities, the data collection period extended from 2002 through 2003. A total of 550 seniors participated in the study. All subjects (or family members when appropriate) signed informed consents, and the protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Studies of Meadville Medical Center.

At the outset, 279 residents (70 skilled, 131 assisted living, and 78 independent) from both centers were asked in interviews to rate preferred music genres from among eight categories. Religious music was the leading choice at Wesbury United Methodist,

while popular music topped the list at Fredericka Manor.

The program was conducted by an interdisciplinary facilitation team that

WHAT IS RECREATIONAL MUSIC-MAKING?

RMM is defined in terms of three key approaches:

- **Active music-making** refers to singing, clapping, or playing an instrument with a group. Achievement is measured in the joy of participating and the bio-psychosocial benefits realized by the individual. Examples include recreational keyboard activities, drum circles, and Clavinova sing-alongs.
- **Transcendent participation** refers to activities in which the subject listens to and participates in a guided or facilitated program. The primary objective is to utilize music that enables one to move past a seemingly insurmountable challenge such as overwhelming loneliness or personal loss.
- **Purposeful listening** is the process of playing specific live or recorded music for an individual or a group. The objective is to alter the mood or affect the behavior of the listeners.

included a physician, two music therapists, a music teacher, musicians, and members of the facilities' activities staffs. The Clavinova, a state-of-the-art digital piano, served as the principal instrument. A specially designed keyboard overlay was used to reduce operational complexity and promote easier use for non-musicians.

The Clavinova Connection

The basic protocol employed—the "Clavinova Connection"—was offered in a group-learning environment consisting of four residents and a facilitator. With an emphasis on promoting

RMM principles along with an immediate sense of achievement, each one-hour weekly session included:

- An arrival song, played while the facilitator warmly welcomed each participant;
 - A mind-body wellness Clavinova warm-up, featuring music, movement, imagery, and awareness;
 - A drum circle, in which each Clavinova keyboard was used to simulate a drum kit;
 - Improvisation: pentatonic-based exercises performed with dynamic soundscapes;
 - Musical insight: a discussion of musical concepts;
 - A song of the day, comprised of group and individual playing of a designated song developed to condition a sense of fulfillment, enthusiasm, and personal accomplishment;
 - A mind-body wellness Clavinova cool-down, during which the initial exercise was repeated;

BARRY B. BITTMAN, MD, is chief executive officer of Mind-Body Wellness Center, Meadville, Pa.; KARL T. BRUHN, is a music consultant of Bruhn & Associates, Anaheim, Calif.; PHILIP B. LIM, MT-BC, is music instructor at Greene Music, San Diego; ANGELA NEVE, MT-BC, is owner of The Music Therapy Center of California in San Diego; CHRISTINE K. STEVENS, MSW, MT-BC, is a music therapy and wellness consultant with Remo, Valencia, Calif., and CRAIG KNUDSEN, MBA, is a technology advisor in Palm Desert, Calif.

- Reflection: a group discussion focused on awareness and progress; and

- A farewell song, composed to inspire a light-hearted spirit in anticipation of the next class.

Each protocol was developed specifically to meet the RMM constructs. All facilitators participated in extensive on-site training in order to ensure quality and consistency. While sessions varied in accordance with the specific needs of each group and the relative strengths of the facilitator, the RMM components (*see box, page 39*) served as a concise and replicable framework for each program.

The Clavinova-assisted drum circles, for example, were offered as single one-hour sessions and included a Mind-Body Wellness Clavinova exercise; Breaking the Ice (designed to foster group process, camaraderie, and

laughter); the ABCs of Drumming (a three-minute “how-to” presentation of techniques); Rhythmic Naming (learning to play by tapping out the syllables of one’s name); Entrainment Building (promoting listening and natural assimilation); Inspirational Beats (participants were asked to play their responses to key questions and then discuss them with the group); Guided Imagery Drumming (a relaxation exercise where participants drummed along with the story line); Mind-Body Wellness (a repeat of the first component with a focus on positive changes that occurred during the session); and Finale (a discussion of insights that surfaced during the session).

Assessment Methods, Findings

Long term care activities personnel familiar with the participants were enlisted and trained to rate each sub-

ject using a specialized scale, the Visual Analog Recreational Music-Making Assessment (VARMMA), designed by the program’s lead author. The VARMMA is designed to rate six parameters: attentiveness (appearing connected to and observant of the RMM activity), active participation (the state of actually performing the designated RMM activity), socialization (positive interaction with others in the group), positive mood/affect (a cooperative favorable disposition); happiness/contentment/joy (signifies a pleasurable or satisfying experience), and meaningful self-expression (appropriateness of one’s contribution and actions to the program content). The five-point rating scale documents: 0 = none; 1 = minimal; 2 = at times; 3 = often, and 4 = frequent. Residents were categorized according to their level of independence.

A total of 3,740 VARMMA reflections reflecting 22,440 individual parameter assessments (six parameters per VARMMA) were performed. As expected, the highest VARMMA scores were noted in independent and assisted living groups, while the lowest scores were recorded in residents with dementia in the memory support unit.

All groups, with the exception of memory support-skilled, received mean total VARMMA ratings over 12, signifying an average parameter score of 2 or more. Even the skilled care group received a mean rating of 2.99, equal to “often,” for the “attentiveness” parameter.

Resident Observations

After completion of the program, many residents noted the immediate benefits of creating connections with staff and other residents. Participation

in just one RMM session often promoted identifiable and meaningful connections. The predominant conclusion was that there are no “strangers” at the end of an RMM session.

Several residents remarked that their ability to more effectively deal with the loss of a loved one or friend was enhanced through RMM sessions. The acknowledgement of a person who had recently passed on served as an effective means for honoring an important relationship through empathetic group support.

A number of participants commented that RMM positively influenced their overall perspectives and expectations for living in a long term care environment. In addition, residents reported that RMM activities produced far more favorable effects, when compared with antidepressants or mood-stabilizing drugs.

Today, Clavinova Connection graduates routinely perform for other residents before and after meals or during community events. At Fredericka Manor, these individuals also play for Clavinova sing-alongs and serve as volunteers in the care center and other areas where they facilitate RMM wellness activities. As dedicated evangelists, these enthusiastic residents encourage others to participate in RMM activities.

As demonstrated by VARMMA results, coupled with facilitator, staff, and resident impressions, RMM has significant potential to play an important life-enhancing role in the aging continuum. Of substantial importance is the fact that cost-effective group RMM activities can be effectively facilitated by a wide range of individuals, including music therapists, music teachers, staff, and musicians. ■