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Staff perceptions of how music therapy can support palliative care patients in a New Zealand / Aotearoa hospice, with a particular focus on spiritual care.

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Abstract

Staff perceptions of how music therapy can support palliative care patients in a New Zealand / Aotearoa hospice, with a particular focus on spiritual care.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of staff from a hospice, in New Zealand / Aotearoa, regarding the use of music therapy in the care of dying patients. The study has a particular focus on spiritual aspects of palliative care in music therapy, as spirituality is an inherent aspect of the work done by caregivers in palliative care. Hospice staff were asked to reflect on what they knew and understood of music therapy before, and after, a music therapy student arrived at the hospice, and their narratives were explored to uncover the links between patients, music and spirituality. The aim of this was to identify what might be needed to increase knowledge, to improve referral processes, and to increase opportunities for collaborative team work. A cross-section of staff, i.e. two nurses, one doctor, an occupational therapist, and a counsellor, who were part of the palliative care team, were recruited to participate in two semi-structured interviews to discuss their perceptions of the potential for music therapy to support the spiritual needs of hospice patients. A qualitative approach was employed and narrative analysis was used to interpret the interviews. Narrative research emphasises the language of human understanding and in this research it involved gathering participants' 'stories' of their evolving perceptions over time. Findings suggest the language used to describe spiritual care in music therapy was different for each participant although common meanings were drawn from the participants' stories. Commonalities included: music therapy in the hospice was valued by the participants; some participants would like more knowledge to make an informed referral. In addition, staff understanding appeared to have increased over time partly due to educational seminars, sharing at team meetings, actual exposure to music therapy, informal conversations with staff, and participants' growing knowledge of music therapy through their own personal process of learning.

Keywords: spirituality, staff perceptions, hospice, music therapy, palliative

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Ethical statement

Participants gave informed consent to be involved and all names were changed to protect their identity. Palliative care is a sensitive area, so care was taken to keep all information confidential. Permission was granted for the study to be conducted at the hospice. The study was given ethical approval by the Central Regional Ethics Committee on 16th July 2010 (CEN/10/EXP/035).