

# Personalised music for people with dementia in the acute setting

## Introduction

Musical memories are stored in areas of the brain that are among the last to be affected by dementia. Listening to personalised music enables the person with dementia to recall memories that may otherwise be lost, transporting them to the past and reconnecting the person to their identity and their loved ones.

Compiling and listening to a playlist with carers and/or staff focuses on individuality, uniqueness and life experience of the person with dementia, which is concordant with best practice guidelines for person centred care. The use of music with people with dementia aids memory function, increases social interaction, improves verbal and non-verbal communication and restores a sense of identity and independence. Music can also reduce agitation and pain. At the very minimum personalised music can provide a sense of security, belonging and familiarity in a world that can feel increasingly alien to the person with dementia.

Nottingham University Hospitals Trust is the first trust in England to pilot a project called Playlist for Life. It originated in Scotland in 2013 after Sally Magnuson noticed how listening to personalised music greatly benefitted her mother who had Alzheimer's Disease. Sally founded the charity called Playlist for Life which works to bring the benefits of personally meaningful music in dementia care to as many people as possible in the UK. Nottingham University Hospital Charity funded the project which was piloted on F20, a busy Health Care of Older People ward at the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham.

## Methods

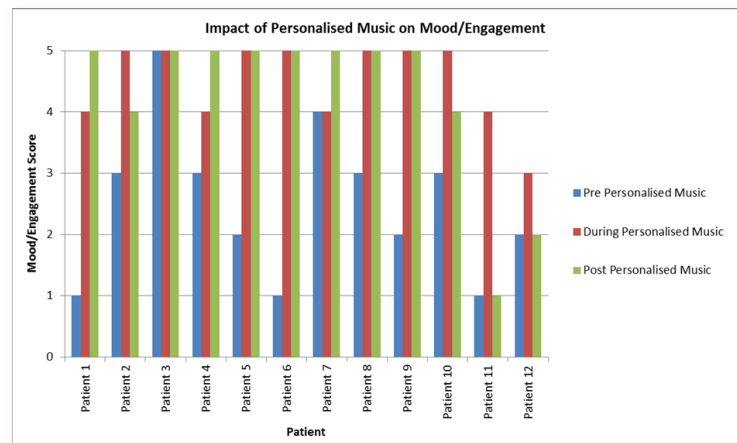
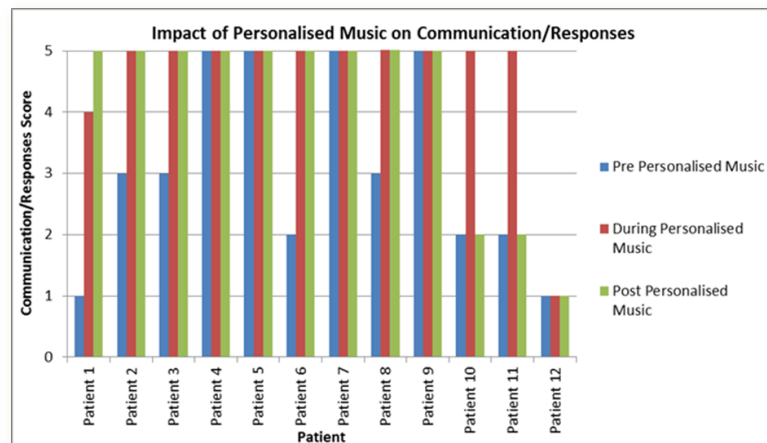
There were two essential characteristics for inclusion; 1) a diagnosis of dementia 2) sufficient length of stay.

Patients and carers were approached and informed of the potential benefits, and if wishing and able, patients were requested to list songs that were meaningful to them and that they would enjoy listening to. If the patient was unable to provide a list of songs, carers/family were encouraged to create a playlist on the patients behalf. These playlists were created using iTunes and downloaded to iPod shuffles which were provided to the patients free of charge.

An observational tool was created to measure the impact of personalised music on the person with dementia. Semi structured interviews were also conducted with the person with dementia and their carers to identify the perceived benefits of listening to personalised music.

## Results

Listening to personalised music created an extended sense of self, provided meaningful occupation for patients to engage in, reduced frustration and boredom experienced by many patients in this setting and improved mood, confidence, engagement, communication, social interaction and psychological well-being.



## Conclusion

We have used a truly patient centred deliverable approach to dementia care in an acute setting which has improved patient and carer experience. Following the success of this pilot we are planning to roll it out across all of the health care of older people wards in Nottingham University Hospitals.

### Patient Quotes

"You're never too old for music"  
 "This is exactly what this place needs"  
 "I can't stop tapping my feet"  
 "It brings you back to the past"  
 "I love music, I always have, pop music, I keep up with the young ones"

### Carers Quotes

"That at a time when we thought he had no cognition whatsoever he smiled and said "good music. A priceless memory whatever may happen and particularly for my mum who shared his love of trad jazz".  
 "It is good to see her smile and start engaging with people. It is also company when she might be on her own for any period. It might also make her sleep."  
 "He was so much calmer & not on edge, he stopped trembling and was different altogether".  
 "He is a lot calmer and happier; he sits and sings along to all the songs".  
 "I feel like I'm the only one who really knows my mum so it was nice to pick out her favourite old records. I could see that it was bringing old memories back and it gave us something to talk about".

## References

Cuddy, L.L., & Duffin, J. (2005) Music, memory, and Alzheimer's disease: is music recognition spared in dementia, and how can it be assessed? *Medical Hypotheses*, 64, pp. 229-235  
 Jennings, B; Vance, D The Short-Term Effects of Music Therapy on Different Types of Agitation in Adults with Alzheimer's *Activities Adaptation and Aging* Volume 26, No. 4, pp. 27-34  
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