



# Music therapy in hospice and palliative care

**Clemente Amoroso**

**Music therapist,**

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**Therapy, Caserta, Italy**

**Elisabetta Piras**

**Pianist, teacher and musicologist, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy**

## Background

Music has always been considered a therapeutic element for the human being. There is a wide range of scientific literature on this subject, and Music Therapy is a recognized discipline. In general we can say that Music Therapy is a non-verbal psychotherapeutic method that uses musical interaction as a means of communication and expression. The purpose of the therapy is to help people with psychophysical illnesses, as well as social disease, to develop relationships and to facilitate the resolution of problems that can't be dealt with by verbalization. Music therapy is currently applied in various contexts of helping relationships and to people of all ages.



## Aims

Starting from this point, the purpose of the present study is to present a music therapy experience in the context of hospice, applied to aged people, with different pathologies, starting from the questions: Are there any significant benefits in combining music therapy with standard care? Which are the indicators that allow to identify them?

## Methods

The project took place in a state nursery home for elderly people in Italy in 2015.

The sessions were held once a week for a year; Each session lasted an hour and a half.

During the sessions there was a music therapist, a co-music therapist and two nurses. The entire project was supervised by the medical staff.

The music therapist is a specific professional figure who possesses strong musical and psychological skills, who has completed a professional training course on the application of music in the context of helping relationships, especially in the presence of diseases.

The subjects were people between 75 and 90 years. The group was composed by 12 persons, 8 females and 4 men.

Not all subjects were totally self-sufficient, four of them had evident mobility problems and 7 had significant problems with mental degeneration (dementia and Alzheimer's disease).

The other components showed a good general health situation, consistent with age.

The project had creativity as a conceptual basis, in the belief that adults stop playing by giving up an already savored pleasure, then replacing it with surrogates. Game is not the opposite of what is serious, it is a serious way to use creativity. Creativity is not only an aspect of the artistic process, but also a way to express one's potential. An ingredient to achieve a balanced and harmonious personality development and the construction of meaningful relationships. It can be an extra resource in life for problem solving.



Each session had a fixed frame, structured in:  
call: a musical motive, each session the same  
welcome: a piece of music chosen by the music-therapist, each session different  
different session, of different repertoire  
exploration/improvisation with musical instruments and voice  
individual and/or collective performance moment  
musical listening, when possible with music chosen by the patients themselves,  
final restitution and reflection on the activities carried out, when possible verbal,  
closing of the setting with a musical-play activity.  
Both the music therapist and the therapist actively participated in the session, playing and facilitating discussions and practical organization of activities.

## Results



Each session was the subject of direct observation, and some moments of performance were videos recorded and analyzed by external observers. A questionnaire / interview concerning the experience and the physical and emotional state regarding this was given to the subjects; On the same topic a questionnaire was given to the medical and nursing staff, accompanied by numerous exchanges and structured and non-structured verbal comparisons. The first results showed a notable increase in attentive activities and socializing will. In many cases these characteristics were also found outside the sessions. In general, music in this form of application seems to have had a determining effect in the arousal and in the general quality of tone and mood.

## Discussion

We want to reflect here on the actual meaning of the first results of this observation. Intuitively musical practice is a positive experience for the elderly, especially in situations of mental disorders. There are many benefits provided by music, both in terms of memory, and in terms of "fun", as well as well-being in general, but music as a therapeutic practice has the ambition to really improve and mental and physical change, in association with standard care. In this case, in addition to the results mentioned above, it was possible to detect a significant impact in social behavior and the reduction of agitation, particularly nocturnal, with consequent reduction of drugs, such as those based on benzodiazepines, usually administered, also due to physiological reduction of personnel at night, in many state and private structures.

## Conclusion

This last observation encourages us to deepen the research in a quantitative sense. What we want to highlight is the thinking that led to this acquisition. First results come out an observation of the music therapeutic action in relation to the clinical and social situation as a whole, experienced in a natural situation, in consideration of the general well-being of the person and the material and economic organization of the Institution.

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**Clemente Amoroso: music therapist, bass player, sociologist**

[clemente.amoroso@gmail.com](mailto:clemente.amoroso@gmail.com)

**Elisabetta Piras: pianist, musicologist, teacher, music therapy student**

[angheloruiu@yahoo.it](mailto:angheloruiu@yahoo.it)

Musicaperta- Sound Research Therapy, Caserta, Italy

[musicaperta@email.it](mailto:musicaperta@email.it)

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