

# HEALING HARMONIES: USING THE POWER OF MUSIC TO CONNECT WITH PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS

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## Patient survey of music therapy in psychiatric setting first of its kind in Canada.

It's no secret that music can be a powerful emotional connector for people. From lullabies for babies, to dance songs on the radio, music moves people in ways that few other art forms can. For people in psychological distress, music can be a soothing and comforting form of therapy. That's why Richmond Hospital's Psychiatric Inpatient Unit makes music therapy available to its patients. Angie Ji, an accredited music therapist at Richmond Hospital, says the unique advantage of music therapy is that it is intrinsically beautiful.

*“Inherent in music are the qualities that can draw people in and engage them. All at once with music you can integrate all levels of the self: body, mind, and spirit. Those musical elements of rhythm and melody can draw someone in at all*

*levels of functioning and create emotional and physiological changes in the body."*

Ji and her colleagues offer two types of music therapy sessions to patients: active or receptive. Active therapy means engaging with the music—singing, playing an instrument or moving the body. Receptive therapy may involve just sitting or lying still and listening, which helps patients relax.



*Depending on therapy goals and the patient's state of mind, the music therapists tailor their approach. If a patient is in distress, or in a manic state, they play or perform calming music. If a patient needs to work on socialization, more lively music and active sessions are appropriate.*

Ji says in the psychiatric setting, music therapy can fill a gap in treatment for severely mentally ill people. These are patients who may be reluctant to take part in other psychiatric interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which require verbal interaction.

“CBT is very effective for some patients, but for others, having to participate in a verbal way can be a barrier,” Ji says. “Music therapy allows patients to engage without having to say anything. They can express themselves and interact in an alternative, non-threatening way. And the beauty of it is they don't have to talk.”

## PATIENTS TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Ji is currently conducting a patient satisfaction survey in the Richmond Psychiatric Inpatient Unit. This survey of psychiatric patients will be the first of its kind in Canada to gather input on group music therapy.

Similar studies in the United States have found high levels of satisfaction with music therapy; in fact many patients said they preferred music therapy over other types of programming. Ji hypothesizes the Canadian survey results will be similar. She says she sees the power of music everyday. “I see it in body language and facial expressions. Someone will come in very agitated and distressed. When they listen to the music their body and face will relax and for a short time they will find solace and peace. Patients often tell me they are really looking forward to a music therapy session.”

Ji says the study is not trying to prove that music therapy results in better patient outcomes. “We’re just trying to get a sense of levels of satisfaction at this point. But, I can say that when patients are engaged in services, when they’re feeling more satisfied with treatment, they may feel happier and they’re prone to do better in their recovery.”

Ji hopes that when the survey is completed next year, patients’ input will guide programming decisions and resource allocation and help music therapists improve their work.