

Conference report

Music Therapy and Oncology Symposium

Mariza Neiada

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7 February 2016

Athens, Greece



Mariza Neiada is a music therapist from Athens and is currently working with children in special education settings. Mariza studied music therapy and vocal performance at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts and completed the Neurologic Music Therapy certification training. From January 2013 to January 2014, Mariza worked as a contracted music therapist at South Shore Conservatory in Massachusetts. From June 2014 to June 2015, she coordinated and participated in a programme which focused on music therapy and parent-infant bonding in cooperation with the Child Psychiatric clinic of a Greek state paediatric university hospital. Since February 2015, Mariza has been working at Psychomotor Athens and conducts individual music therapy sessions with children who have developmental, physical and emotional needs.

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On 7th February 2016, a scientific symposium regarding Music Therapy and Oncology was held at the Acharnes town hall in Acharnes, Athens (see also Acharnon and Breed 2016). Organised by the Greek Cancer Society (EAEF) in cooperation with the Hellenic Association of Certified Professional Music Therapists (ESPEM; www.musictherapy.gr), the symposium included a series of presentations highlighting the effects of music therapy in oncology settings.

The symposium opened with a talk given by Greek Cancer Society representative and president Panagiotis Kazanas. Kazanas emphasised the importance of the public's participation in the Greek Cancer Society's activities as well as the significance of blood donation. Music therapy was presented as a complementary therapy that can have significant effects on oncology patients, along with medical treatment. Studies have shown that it can help with pain management, decrease side effects like nausea and emesis, reduce anxiety and generally enhance coping skills (Cai, Qiao, Li & Lu

2001; Harper 2001; Horne-Thompson & Grocke 2008).

The first presentation included an overview of music therapy and its effect on cancer treatment. The main focus was on Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) and was given by music therapist and primary GIM trainer Evangelia Papanikolaou; the founder of SONORA, the only GIM-related Greek organisation that aims at promoting education, research and clinical programmes in music therapy (Sonora Interdisciplinary Association of Music Therapy and Research 2014). GIM was described as a non-intrusive method that is based on music listening and narration. Music may activate the thinking process and emotional connection, represented by archetypal images that the individual visualises during the therapeutic process. GIM may help revive emotions, sensations and thoughts that might provide insight on deeper personal needs. In practical settings, GIM group sessions are facilitated at the Association of Cancer Patients and Friends Volunteer Doctors (KEFI),



Photograph 1: Symposium poster

which is a centre in Athens aiming to provide emotional, psychological and social support for cancer patients and their families, as well as informing and educating society about cancer (Association of Cancer Patients & Friends Volunteer Doctors Athens 2017).

These group sessions were described as workshops which were offered to cancer patients at KEFI and consist of 12 consecutive two-hour sessions. During the workshop a conversation about common topics is held followed by four to twelve minutes of listening to music. The group then shares the images, the sensations and the emotions they experienced after listening to the music. A research proposal from SONORA in cooperation with Aalborg University (Denmark), Areteio University Hospital (Greece), and global healthcare company NOVARTIS was introduced regarding GIM as a psychological therapy for women for women during active treatment for gynecologic cancer.

The second presentation, given by music therapist Kandia Bouzioti who specialises in vocal psychotherapy, emphasised how music therapy can support cancer patients within a hospital setting. This presentation was a case study of a

cancer patient in a hospital in New York who was diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma. Clinical material in the form of audio and video recordings was presented to illustrate the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the music therapist and the patient, which in this case was enhanced through singing. Additionally, the importance of empowerment and development of coping skills through self-expression was underlined.

Moreover, the third presentation given by music therapist Christina Kalliodi, highlighted how music therapy can enhance family and medical staff support in a hospital setting. The importance of opportunities for self-expression of the medical staff and the families of the cancer patients was considered as equally significant as the self-expression of the patients.

The final presentation was given by music therapist Evangelia Arachoviti, who has a background in musicology and improvisational music therapy, in which she elaborated on “Inter-related music therapy with a cancer patient during the fourth stage of treatment” in London. During this presentation, the importance of improvised music therapy between the patient and the therapist with regard to emotional needs was analysed. Music may be the medium of expressing elements that cannot be verbalised.



Photograph 2: Stergios Padiaditis (vice-major of Acharnes), Evangelia Papanikolaou, Candia Bouzioti, Christina Kalliodi, Evangelia Arachoviti and Panagiotis Kazanas

At the end of the symposium there was time for discussion and audience participation. Since this was the first symposium on music therapy and oncology in Greece, its importance shall be underlined because it provided evidence and examples of how music therapy can have a significant effect on cancer patients. It also educated the community on this relatively new

complementary practice, which is unknown to the majority of the Greek population. Furthermore, the symposium promoted ESPEM, as the audience had the opportunity to be informed about the organisation's purpose and activities. The conclusion of the symposium was that music therapy could be a vital complementary therapy in oncology settings in Greece. The difficulty, however, lies in insufficient government funding and dysfunctional public healthcare in Greece during this period of economic turbulence. In general, music therapy in Greece is underdeveloped (Tsiris 2011). A series of gaps and problems regarding professional recognition and academic training are at the heart of the challenges that music therapy faces in the country. Along with academic recognition, frequent seminars, events and symposiums like this one are needed for the promotion of music therapy on a national basis in Greece. Finally, the symposium ended with a delightful vocal performance by Voice Box, a vocal world music ensemble.



Photograph 3: Performance by Voice Box

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