

Scott: It's called music therapy. People get wigged out about hearing the word therapy. If you could rename it anything, what would you call it?

Bob Hoffman: That's a great question. Music for the soul.

Scott: Welcome to the 3P's of Cancer podcast, where we'll discuss prevention, preparedness and progress in cancer treatments and research, brought to you by the University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center. I'm Scott Riding.

We're here with music therapist, Bob Hoffman to talk about music therapy and its benefits for patients and caregivers. Welcome Bob.

Bob Hoffman: Hi Scott.

Scott: I guess the best way to start is, what is music therapy?

Bob Hoffman: So music therapy is defined by our organization, AMTA, American Music Therapy Association, is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship. Music therapy needs to be done by a credentialed therapist who has completed an approved music therapy program.

Scott: Do you need special training to become a music therapist?

Bob Hoffman: Yes, you do. And although playing music to your grandparents or anybody can be therapeutic, but to be a music therapist there is special training that's involved.

Scott: You mentioned certifications. What is the process to become certified as a music therapist?

Bob Hoffman: So the process, the short way to do it would be to go attend an accredited college or university that has a music therapy program, four year program. Upon completion of that program, you have a six month internship, which is equivalent to about 100, or 1,020 hours. And upon completion of your internship you're eligible to sit for the board to become board certified and to attain the credentials MTBC, which stands for music therapist, board certified.

Scott: Many therapists and doctors and other specialists have a subspecialty that they focus on. How did you come to deal more on an oncology side of a music therapist compared to maybe another specialty?

Bob Hoffman: So oncology, I first began that work over in pediatrics. While in pediatrics I worked in all the different units and different settings. One of them was



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oncology. What happened is there was a music therapist over here in the Rogel Cancer Center that worked part-time and she also had a private practice. Well, she left to nurture her private practice and there was an opening, so rather than seeing the position disappear I decided to take a few hours over here as well. And gradually more hours opened up and I enjoyed my work here, as I did in peds, but I felt it was a good fit over here at the cancer center.

Scott: Have you always been focused... You mentioned the pediatric side and then moving over here part-time and then full-time from an hour standpoint with working with patients. Have you always been, since you've been a certified music therapist, in oncology?

Bob Hoffman: So prior to coming over here to the Rogel Cancer Center and Pete at Mott, my beginnings in music therapy were in behavioral health at Sparrow Hospital. Upon graduating and doing my internship at Sparrow, I was hired on as staff and worked in an intensive outpatient therapy clinic. Within that setting there was a PhD psychologist that did the group therapy. There was a psychiatrist that administered medications, there was a clinical nurse and then myself as a music therapist. In that setting I primarily did process groups where we dealt with issues such as self esteem and grief and loss and events in their life that may have put them in this setting, these patients.

Scott: Was there anything in particular that made you want to move from that behavioral health setting over to an oncology setting? Or was it just happenstance that different opportunity, different growth?

Bob Hoffman: It really was happenstance. I very much enjoyed my work in behavioral health. However, at the time I was living in Ann Arbor and commuting to East Lansing and it was about a 75 mile commute one way. And after about five years of winters blowing across 127, something opened up here at Mott, and I decided to take the position down here.

Scott: What was it that made you decide to become a music therapist?

Bob Hoffman: Well I was halfway through music school out in Boston and someone invited me to what was billed as the world premier music and medicine documentary. So I attended it out of curiosity, and it was a very well done presentation. By the time it was over I was very intrigued. And I wouldn't say that I knew I wanted to be a music therapist, but I definitely wanted to learn more about it. As fate would have it. The spring that I graduated, that next fall they were implementing a music therapy program at Berkeley College of Music, so they'd already hired the chair, Dr. Hanser to come in and set the program up. And I paid many visits to her office to explore music therapy in greater detail and depth. And by the time I did graduate at Berkeley I knew at that time I did want



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to pursue a career in music therapy.

Scott: What were you originally focusing on before making that switch? You said you were in music school, but was there a particular aspect of it there?

Bob Hoffman: Yes. My particular major at school, I very much enjoyed it was actually called professional music. And what that enabled me to do, that major, is that you could sample a little bit of all of the other disciplines such as education, if you want to go into music education, music engineering, music performance. So I got to experience all of those things. But to answer your question, I think originally I saw myself more as a studio musician, doing that type of work.

Scott: So has music always been a big part of your life?

Bob Hoffman: I would say yes. From the time I was a young child, we always had a piano in the house. I remember fondly of my father playing the piano quite often. He would come home from work and before he'd take his coat off sometimes he'd sit down at the piano and play for about 15, 20 minutes. I'm sure to unwind from his busy work day. Aside from that, I started playing music in bands at the age of 12, and continue to play in musical settings outside of work today.

Scott: I know you usually have a guitar with you, has guitar always been your main instrument of choice, or was there other instruments that you also excelled at?

Bob Hoffman: Guitar has always been my main instrument of choice and I'm grateful for that in this setting because it's a wonderful instrument in a hospital setting. So how I became to play guitar is a story. My best friend and I, we went to a dance at the local YMCA at the tender age of 12. Where the boys were on one side and the girls were on the other. However, they had a live band with a light show and everything. And after feeling that music, and I mean just feeling it, and watching that band, we walked out of there and one of us said, I'll play guitar, you play drums. Or he said, I'll play drums, you play guitar. And that's what we did. And I bought a cheap \$10 guitar, electric guitar, and he bought a cheap drum set and we ended up playing music together for the next six years.

Scott: Did you play it at the same dance in the future?

Bob Hoffman: Yes, we did. We did play at the YMCA and grade school and on to high school and different gigs.

Scott: Has he continued in music as well that you know of?



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Bob Hoffman: Yes, he has. But we're still very close friends. He's a professor actually at Penn State University, but has continued to play music. And he just recently told me he sold his full drum set, but he does still play percussions.

Scott: And do you still play in any kind of bands or did you continue bands after you went to college? I'm assuming since you said you wanted to focus on maybe being a studio band member, but...

Bob Hoffman: Yes, I continue to play music. I worked in various show bands and did a lot of work in the summer and in the fall. And also work with my wife doing coffee houses and various duo venues such as that.

Scott: You talked about your first experience at the YMCA with the band, listening to the band, that you really felt the music. As a music therapist working with a patient or a family member, or a caregiver, or even someone nearby, do you feel that aspect of feeling the music is healing?

Bob Hoffman: I do. I'll often even position my guitar so the sound is projecting all over them, covering them with sound. I feel there is healing through vibration, although that is a whole separate field.

Scott: And I know that it's not going to be healing from a medical standpoint, but healing the soul, so to speak, from a standpoint of bringing some comfort is kind of I guess where I'm thinking about it.

Bob Hoffman: Yes, because music has been such a part of all of our lives from an early age. It does, it affects your soul, your being. It brings up memories. It takes us back to places and times that we remember fondly. And it's healing in that way. Music has a way to let us express our feelings and emotions where sometimes words fall short. I can't tell you how many times I've been in intensive care rooms with family members as well as the patient and I'll be playing and all of a sudden I'll see tears start pouring down the faces of family members. And I know that it's the music that's allowed them to express those intense feelings at this time where words may have been awkward.

Scott: How do patients, caregivers, even staff benefit from music therapy?

Bob Hoffman: Well as I mentioned earlier, music is pervasive, it's been in our lives, a part of our lives. It's everywhere. It's now more than ever so assessable. So it's something that we relate to, it's innate, we feel it, it evokes emotion, it helps us express feelings. And that can be from a patient standpoint, but in the setting with staff and caregivers around there's something we call secondary efficacy. And that's where there's another benefit that maybe wasn't intended. And an example would be working in an area that's high stress and patients are maybe



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critical, and staff is on edge and it's intense, but the music relaxes the whole area and it relaxes the staff. Family members, as we said, as well as the patients. And so that would be the secondary efficacy or benefit from music.

Scott: What are some of the different [crosstalk 00:13:37] customizations that you've done with patients?

Bob Hoffman: So over here in the cancer center, we've done songwriting, we've done recording projects, sometimes end of life heartbeat recordings where we'll put music to a heartbeat if that's the desire of the patient or the family.

Scott: Something I think that would be nice and calming and soothing for me in those kinds of situations would be something like Somewhere Over the Rainbow. Are you able to play that for us?

Bob Hoffman: Sure. Sometimes we'll play music that's instrumental music that has words to it, such as Somewhere Over the Rainbow. And sometimes we'll play instrumental music that has no lyrics, and it just depends on what's going on and what the preference is. But here's a nice instrumental version of Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

Speaker 3: [music 00:14:35].

Scott: This has been really great and informative, Bob. I'm wondering as we wrap up here, is there anything that we didn't discuss, anything that you feel is important for people to know about music therapy and its benefits?

Bob Hoffman: I feel it's important for people to know that in order to participate in music therapy or benefit from it, you don't have to have a knowledge of music or play an instrument to receive those benefits. And it's certainly noninvasive. Music is everywhere, is a part of our lives and will continue to be a part of our lives. So I think I'd like to really stress that fact that if you're worried about, oh no, here comes a music therapist, I'm going to have to sing or advance or do something, not to worry about that you can just sit there and receive and enjoy.

Scott: Well again, thank you again for the time, Bob.

Bob Hoffman: My pleasure.

Scott: Thank you for listening and tell us what you think of this podcast by rating and reviewing us. If you have suggestions for additional topics, you can send them to [cancercenter@med.umich.edu](mailto:cancercenter@med.umich.edu), or message us on Twitter, @UMRogelCancer. You can continue to explore the 3P's of cancer by visiting [RogelCancerCenter.org](http://RogelCancerCenter.org).



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