

Music Therapy Department Philosophy:

At SVWC, we believe in honoring and celebrating daily the history and vision of every resident's unique life story. Every resident joining this community brings with them a diversity of life experiences, talents, and wishes for how they would like to live the remaining years of their life. What unifies members of our community is their desire and right to exercise this personal intent throughout life's changing circumstances, within the chosen comfort, support, and dependency of expert health care. This person-directed humanistic approach to care is the foundation of this community; it is at the heart of every community member, activity, interaction, and department and the music therapy department is no different.

At the core of every music therapy session is the resident. Their needs, strengths, preferences, background, and wishes guide the treatment goal planning and this in turn determines the approach to music therapy that we select. Residents are referred to 1-on-1 and group music therapy services in all levels of care by staff, self, or family and for a variety of cognitive, physical, communicative, and psychosocial/emotional treatment needs. Assessment and an interdisciplinary approach to care are incorporated to identify and honor the resident's wishes. The music therapy assessment also determines need, appropriateness, and preferences. In some cases, music therapy may be contraindicated and alternative treatment may be found to serve the resident best. However, in most cases, music therapy is an effective, meaningful, and more appropriate therapeutic intervention. In these cases, the music therapist works with the treatment team to establish a treatment care plan and then structures and facilitates the therapy, utilizing a variety of evidence-based intervention techniques that best supports the goal. On-going assessment and documentation of progress from referral through to discharge is also standard practice.

With the therapy needs of the community varying from maintaining holistic wellness for residents living independently, to facilitating physical, cognitive, communicative, and psychosocial rehabilitation for disease processes, to providing end-of-life support for a resident and their family facing a terminal diagnosis; the music therapy department incorporates a variety of evidence-based methodologies and techniques in order to meet the diverse therapeutic needs of each resident. We believe that if we are truly providing music therapy from a person-directed perspective, we must be skilled and flexible in facilitating techniques that will best meet the needs of our residents. For this reason, the music therapy department embraces the Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT) and Hospice and Palliative Care Music Therapy (HPMT) models, in addition to our person-directed humanistic approach to care.

Residents wishing to improve upon or maintain their cognitive or physical functioning are typically provided group and individual music therapy utilizing NMT protocol. For individuals with Parkinson's disease, this might mean attending the NMT Exercise Group or receiving 1-on-1 music therapy for gait training. For a resident rehabbing from a stroke, 1-on-1 music therapy might be provided, utilizing NMT speech techniques to improve their speech intelligibility. Residents living with dementia may choose to attend a music therapy group that best meets their cognitive abilities, where NMT interventions are utilized to exercise short term memory, long term memory, and various types of attention. In these instances, the NMT approach is purposefully utilized because of the evidence-based impact of these standardized techniques on effectively creating changes in the neurologic structure and non-musical functions of the brain.

In other cases, residents might be struggling with emotional, spiritual, or social challenges, such as dealing with the death of a loved one, transition trauma related to moving from one level of living to another, or adjusting to a loss of some aspect of independence. In these cases, a more humanistic music therapy approach is typically more appropriate and effective. This could include song writing in a 1-on-1 session to help a resident process grief and say goodbye to their deceased spouse, or it could look like attending Spirit Song, a group co-facilitated with our chaplains, where we utilize lyric analysis and verbal processing to address such challenges as holiday grief, loneliness, stress, and forgiveness. It could also include resident participation in a Chime Ensemble as a means of meeting new friends and improving their sense of purpose by learning a new skill and performing in a concert as a necessary member of the group. In these examples, the familiar relatable qualities of the music help to create a less-threatening environment, which in turn leads to self-expression and the strengthening of rapport and relationships. The ability of music therapists to adapt their facilitation to meet the ever-changing personalized abilities of the residents also enables residents to feel motivated by their success.

Most of our residents come to a point in their lives where they decide they no longer wish to undergo any life-sustaining interventions or actively work on improving their functioning. Often, this is the point where a resident chooses to be placed on comfort care measures or hospice and is often when they have accepted that the end of their life is approaching. During these circumstances, music therapy is often provided 1-on-1, utilizing a humanistic and HPMT perspective. Interventions are utilized to decrease signs and symptoms of discomfort such as pain and respiration, to provide life review, and to create a peaceful, familiar, environment for the resident and loved ones as the resident nears the end of their life. We know that music is so connected to one's sense of self and identity. By utilizing a resident's individual musical experiences; songs associated with personal memories and of their musical preferences unique to their upbringing, culture, and life, we can access and validate their sense of reality, their relationships, and feelings of importance and dignity.

No matter the need or approach, music therapy effectively provides individualized support and positive changes for our residents. We believe that music therapy is so effective in addressing such a large scope of individualized treatment needs because it utilizes the intrinsic organizing and motivating properties of music and successfully integrates each resident's personal and musical story in a familiar, non-threatening way, thus honoring each resident's very being. Perhaps the following resident statements best sum up the impact of music therapy at SVWC: "it reminds us what we are capable of," "I feel like with music, I haven't lost a thing."

Intern Training Philosophy:

The music therapy internship at Westminster is structured to provide gradual growth and independence of the intern. Interns follow both a supervisory alliance model and a developmental model; being provided a schedule, required observation for at least the first month, and guided opportunities for exploration, preparation, and self-reflection. The expectation is that the intern will conduct individual and group music therapy sessions independently by the third or fourth month of internship, co-lead select sessions with the internship director, but more importantly, the goal is that interns will develop confident independence with facilitation, time management, and self-evaluation; skills necessary as a music therapist. We feel strongly that interns learn best when given structure, modeled behavior, and defined expectations, along with plenty of support when transitioning to independent facilitation. While these are the expectations, the time frame in which interns complete these goals is dependent on the needs and skills of the intern. In these cases, we work with the intern to provide extra support in order to ensure they complete internship within the expected time frame.

One important aspect of a successful internship is clear and honest communication from both the intern and the supervisor. This type of communication is encouraged through formal weekly meetings and journal writings. Interns also share an office with the internship director, which allows for greater opportunity for additional communication, feedback, and supervision. Interns are encouraged to ask for guidance and supervision if additional support is needed and they will experience modeling of this desired communication throughout their internship. The second most important aspect of a successful internship is consistent demonstration of proactive and self-reflective learning. Throughout internship, the internship director will demonstrate and guide the intern through the process of evaluating one's work after every session, providing feedback, addressing issues, asking for the intern's input along the way. However, in turn, the intern will have many opportunities to assert themselves and share their self-evaluations, working towards the goal of developing the necessary skill of independence as a facilitator without the dependence of initial outside feedback.

With music as the primary tool utilized during therapy, interns will develop their already stable incoming foundation of musical skills over the course of their internship. Interns will be expected to facilitate therapy utilizing a variety of accompaniment instruments while singing; guitar, autoharp, piano, various percussion instruments, Qchord and tone chimes. When initially beginning internship, interns will be assigned specific repertoire to practice and learn and will be given time to do so independently, in order to develop the necessary skill of learning music efficiently. Interns will be provided with musical coaching by the supervising music therapist on how to further utilize differing strum and finger picking patterns, facilitate stylistic differences between genres and musical facilitation tips for working with older adults. Additional coaching from the music therapist is always available if needed. Interns are also encouraged to listen regularly to genres, artists and song versions popular to the clientele, in order to further develop appropriate facilitation. Throughout internship, interns may also be assigned specific songs to learn but will typically independently learn three plus songs a week.