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The Healing Power of Live Music – Abstract

Brianna Casey

Music has long been recognized for its ability to promote healing and wellbeing in patients across the entire spectrum of healthcare settings. Thanks to recent research into its therapeutic effects, music is now widely accepted as an established part of a holistic healthcare regime. However, more work needs to be done in defining the aspects inherent to music that make it such an effective agent of healing. Notably, little research has been done on whether live musical performance is more effective than recorded music in bringing about therapeutic benefits. The current project sought to explore the differential perceptions of and responses to live and recorded musical performances among patients in a long-term health care setting. Three sessions of each type of performance were held in the Jefferson Rehabilitation Unit for a small audience of patients who were administered a questionnaire assessing mental and emotional state, level of engagement, and opinions regarding the role of music during their hospital stay. While the numerically scaled portions of the questionnaire did not yield significant results, the open-ended portions suggested higher levels of engagement among patients during the live sessions. In addition, patients reported greater enjoyment of the live performances and increased interest in attending the concert when informed that live musicians would be present. Overall, the increased engagement and stimulation elicited by the live performances may enhance the therapeutic effects of music when compared to recorded performances, as other research suggests that mental engagement is a key mediator of the healing process. Consequently, digital recordings of performances, while more easily accessible, may not in fact be effective replacements of their live counterparts in terms of fostering engagement and thus healing in patient populations.