

PREFACE

Special Feature | Music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care: Mediterranean perspectives

Preface

Melissa Mercadal-Brotos

Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (Esmuc), Spain

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Melissa Mercadal-Brotos, PhD, MT-BC, SMTAE, is currently the President of the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT) and was the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) country representative for Spain between 2013-2019. She is the Academic Director of the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (Esmuc) where she also directs the Master Programme in Music Therapy. Her clinical and research work focuses on the area of dementia and has published extensively nationally and internationally on this topic. She leads the Special Interest Group of the IAMM 'Music therapy in the context of dementia: People with dementia and their caregivers'. [brotos@compuserve.com]

Publication history:

Submitted 26 Jan 2019

Accepted 24 Jan 2020

First published 30 May 2020

Welcome to this special feature of *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*. Edited by Giorgos Tsiris and Enrico Ceccato, this edition is inspired by the 1st Mediterranean Music Therapy Meeting, which took place in Padua, Italy, on 22nd September 2018. I want to congratulate and thank the organising team of this event, Scuola di Musicoterapia Giovanni Ferrari de Padova, with the patronage of the Italian Association of Professional Music Therapists (AIM) and the Italian Confederation of Associations and Music Therapy Schools (CONFIAM), for their initiative and efforts to create a space for music therapy professionals from different Mediterranean countries to meet, share and exchange experiences. The title of the meeting, *'Dialogue on Music Therapy Interventions for Dementia and End-Of-Life Care: Voices from Beyond the Sea'* illustrates clearly the focus of the event. The programme incorporated a beautiful balance of theoretical presentations, workshops and music performances. It was certainly a unique opportunity for me to participate in this meeting as an expert in music therapy with PWD and as President of the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT).

I have worked as a clinician, teacher, and researcher within the field of music therapy for over 30 years, and have had the opportunity to be a part of, and witness, the development of music therapy in different parts of the world. These experiences have taught me to celebrate two things. Firstly, that it is important to praise the many layers of diversity that exist among all of us, such as the various theories and approaches to research, cultural intricacies, training backgrounds, therapeutic methodologies, and the many languages through which we express ourselves. To embrace all these layers of diversity requires openness and an ability to listen, connect, and work together. Secondly, it is important to celebrate the oneness that we have together. Many commonalities exist across the eight regions of the globe encompassed by the WFMT; many more than we often perceive.

The WFMT was established in 1985 by a team of dynamic, pioneering music therapists to strengthen international links and promote the profession of music therapy globally. The awareness that the establishment and recognition of the music therapy profession is varied across countries calls for a delicate balance between global and local aspects of professional development. To this end, the growth, organisation and professionalisation of music therapy continues across the world. At the various conferences, meetings and symposia held to further our profession, practice examples are shared and we can all learn from one another. Subsequently, topics related to training, current situation, future prospects and viability for professional regulation are addressed in many countries from different perspectives.

The Mediterranean countries fall into two of the WFMT regions: Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Each region has a dedicated member of the WFMT Council, a Regional Liaison, who establishes contact with representatives from professional associations or individual music therapists in relevant countries, and who presents regular reports of local news via the WFMT website and social media. The WFMT members are a mixture of professional bodies, music therapists, students and allied organisations from around the world. In Europe, many of the Southern countries bordering the Mediterranean have qualified, practising music therapists with considerable years of experience and professional associations who are actively contacting and communicating with their governmental institutions to promote and/or improve the recognition process of music therapy. Both the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) and the WFMT play a part in promoting collaboration and exchange between therapists, helping to equip them for this task.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region of the WFMT extends to the continents of Africa and Western Asia, containing countries set within diverse cultural and political contexts, and where our profession is, in many cases, barely represented. We hear of widely differing attitudes towards the recognition of the psychosocial needs of individuals within healthcare systems, and such diversity is also reflected in the music therapy profession. This presents itself at different stages of development in each of the countries in regard to: number of professional music therapists, training courses, professional associations, number and type of facilities which offer music therapy services, populations served by music therapists, recognition of the profession, research activity/production and music therapy-specific publications. These variations highlight another issue: the challenge of diversity, tensions and contradictions in the field of music therapy. However, these challenges can also be looked at as an *opportunity* for current as well as future music therapists in these countries. Certainly, the field is in the very pioneering stages in this huge region, with very few professional music therapists. However, the hard and continuous work of those who are there contributes to raising awareness about the possibilities and benefits music offers to people with specific needs and helps to create job opportunities. On the other hand, the current challenges and struggles music therapists face in these countries, where the profession is in its infancy, are the overall lack of awareness of what music therapy is, sustainability of practice, and having no standardised guidelines to support practice. It is enlightening for the WFMT to learn from those stories in order to help promote the field in the best way possible in the Eastern Mediterranean, in liaison with national and other international associations and professional bodies.

Events such as the 1st Mediterranean Music Therapy Meeting are always enriching and motivating, since they foster collaboration and welcome dialogue. In addition, it is an opportunity to

meet professionals from other countries and learn about their work while highlighting some common elements and patterns. Meetings, working group discussions, coffee breaks, walks and dinners – all have offered opportunities for exchange, debate, and mutual support. The international professional group who gathered on this occasion certainly highlighted the diverse landscape of music therapy across cultures; bringing to the fore varied histories and paths of professional development, as well as financial and political priorities and needs. I hope this is the beginning of many more in this region of the world, and that they allow diverse voices to be heard. Research, theory development and dialogue are essential components for maintaining a reflexive stance while revisiting music therapy's histories and envisioning its future development in relation to the changing needs and resources of society.

As President of the WFMT, attending and presenting at these types of events, it is a great opportunity to talk about the WFMT and to share the work of the Council and of our members. This reaffirms why the WFMT exists, and what it can offer to assist all the music therapy professionals and pioneers who work persistently to advance the development and growth of the profession in their own countries. When we work together, we can accomplish much. Thank you for hosting an amazing educational, networking, cultural and social event! It was an honour to represent the WFMT and to support the continued efforts to foster communication between therapists and countries within the Mediterranean region.