

BOOK REVIEW

Music in paediatric hospitals: Nordic perspectives (Bonde & Johansson, Eds.)

Reviewed by Marion Musting

Independent scholar, Estonia



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Imagine if music was accessible to all mankind whether they were healthy or sick, and that promoting health through music was perceived as a valuable discipline integrated into every healthcare system. Unfortunately, despite music therapy in the context of paediatric care being a globally evolving area of practice, there are still countries where music therapy in paediatrics is not yet systematically integrated. As evident from the perspective of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark), implementing music therapy in a medical setting can be challenging in various ways. It could be the lack of context-sensitive research evidence for the effectiveness of music therapy, as is the case with Estonia, my home country. Not having secure funding, which is often closely tied to proving the efficacy and "showing the value" of the work can also be an obstacle. Informing healthcare managers and gaining acceptance within the paediatric team is another challenge music therapists face.

Music in paediatric hospitals: Nordic perspectives gives an overview of the current state of music therapy practices in children's hospitals in the Nordic countries. Through exploring the work of practitioners and researchers, the book, which has seven chapters, explores the history of local music therapy practice in paediatric medical settings, the implementation of music therapy programs, and music therapy as valuable emotional support for the whole family.

Through the book, common themes and discussions related to the growth of the field are outlined by different authors: the importance of cultural sensitivity and multicultural aspects when implementing music therapy programs; the necessity for a relevant evidence base within the local

health care context; the relevance of raising awareness among healthcare managers and clinicians, and the need for music therapists to clearly communicate their work to healthcare professionals, patients and funders.

These issues are also very much present in Estonia. Although music therapy in paediatric hospitals is not entirely new in Estonia, the profession in the medical setting as a whole has not yet been established. One of the biggest issues is related to the local health care system where music therapy as a profession has not been recognised as part of the health insurance policy. The first attempts to introduce music therapy in this setting were made around 2012 in children and young peoples' psychiatric services. Over the years there have been individual music therapy posts in both the private and public sector, however, they have all been short-term (e.g. as part of dissertation research) and/or with external funding. In 2019 the first NICU music therapy program was initiated, again as a short-term project. It is clear though (as also reflected in this current book) that project-based work is time-limited and puts the growth and continuity of the field at risk. Evidently there is a strong need for a local research base for raising awareness of the field so that changes in health care contexts can be made and music therapists can be employed by hospitals.

In the first chapter the authors state that "models of practice are not directly transferable across cultural context and health care systems" (p. 8) and provide an important reminder for local practitioners to consider conducting context-sensitive local research in order to identify possible gaps music therapy can fill. The history of music therapy in Estonia is closely tied to that of Nordic practitioners and, I dare to believe, the Nordic countries and their models of practice are regarded as being worthy of emulation. This is understandable due to regional closeness as well as cultural similarities. While being currently the sole music therapist in Estonia working in the NICU music therapy field, I find this particular chapter to be especially close to my heart since there are many parallels to draw with the implementation of NICU music therapy in Sweden and Norway with that of Estonia. Similarly to the Nordic countries, Estonia has a long history of infant and Family-Centred Care (FCC) in neonatal units which brings its own opportunities and unique ways music therapy can play a part in supporting the whole family.

In the third chapter, cultural and multicultural aspects and their role in music therapy practice are discussed. In a world where societies have become more open and thus multicultural, this is a theme that cannot be overlooked. Although music is perceived as a universal language, cultural differences play their role when creating local music therapy programmes. In the same way, in Estonia a music therapist can experience challenges to take a multicultural approach when working in a medical setting. Multilingual environments can be quite complex when language barriers are considered. On the other hand, music as a non-verbal communication tool opens up wonderful opportunities for a music therapist to connect with the patient by providing sensitive and respectful attention to their culture and music. This aspect, to my mind, gives the music therapist the significant advantage of providing essential emotional support in a sensitive environment such as a hospital.

The following chapters explore how music therapy can provide procedural support, including pain-management and lowering patient and family anxiety. It is also recommended that having a clear documentation tool that is comprehensive for medical staff is crucial when communicating the work of a music therapist in a professional way. Music therapy as a procedural support is virtually an unknown in Estonia. The focus has been mostly on emotional support, and mood and mental

disorders. The Nordic experience certainly gives valuable insight into the possible research and practice areas for practitioners in other countries.

Ultimately, this book reflects the contributions Nordic practitioners have made locally in advocating music therapy in paediatric medical settings. The book provides valuable information for practitioners who work in countries where the music therapy profession has not yet been established in medical settings. But it also has great potential value for informing healthcare managers about music therapy as a vital complement to a more humanistic and family centered healthcare system. Hopefully the work that the Nordic countries have done gives a valuable reference for other countries, including Estonia, so that new music therapy positions can be created in the future.