

What is Harp Therapy?

For centuries, the beneficial relationship between music and healing has been well established. We now have substantial documentation of the responsiveness to and appreciation of music by peoples of all ages and cultures. Music played on the harp has several unique healing properties. The resonance from the strings, including the range of pitch and tonal color, set up an important relationship between the sound and the recipient. Historically, the harp has been a symbol of relief and comfort.

Practitioner graduates of the International Harp Therapy Program use the small harp as a bedside instrument with the intention of supporting the recipient's goal of healing. This goal may be emotional, physical, mental or spiritual in nature. The soothing sounds of the harp not only can enhance the quality of life, but create the possibility of interactive work in which the recipient might play the harp. Working with the therapeutic harp is as varied as our clients are.

What is Resonance?

Everything is comprised of moving energy. On the densest form, is matter on earth such as rocks, water, trees. As the vibrational energy increases from the matter form, we experience flavors, aromas, audible sounds, ultrasounds, radio waves, colors, infrared energy, microwaves, gamma rays and debatable, ultimately to Spirit energy. By understanding the concept of sympathetic vibrations where the energy of one object causes the energy of another object to vibrate, we can begin to understand how Sound Therapy can work on the body. If a singer sings a very high note that reaches the same frequency of a crystal glass, then the glass will break. In the baroque era, old instruments called viola d'amores were built. They had an extra row of strings under the strings that were bowed. The "sympathetic strings" would vibrate along with the same frequency as the strings above being bowed and the volume of sound would increase. Likewise, if we sing a certain frequency and place our hands on the back of our necks, usually by singing an eee or uuu vowel and experimenting with different pitches, one can find the point where their neck will respond to the "sympathetic vibration". It is as though one is receiving a massage from the inside out. During the times we experience cold congestion, it is especially good to sing as it vibrates the pockets in the lungs and helps to break up trapped pockets of moisture.

Each person has a tone that they are in sympathetic vibration with. The role of the Harp Practitioner is to find the Resonant Tone and then to improvise music based on that tone and on the breathing rate of the individual. At the same time, the Certified Harp Practitioner will aim to incorporate a type of music that the patient enjoyed listening to be it classical, popular, country western or music from many other categories.

Research is in progress to notice the effectiveness of certain frequencies of music on the various areas of the body such as the colon, circulation, kidneys, migraine headaches to name a few. Gall bladder stones are now removed with using laser beams – vibrational energy – directed to them to break the stone into smaller stones so they can pass. Sound therapy, Resonance, works in the same way using a lower frequency.

People of all ages and circumstances benefit from the Therapeutic Harp

In Hospices, transitional stages are often an area where harp music can be very supportive. When the Harp Practitioner finds the Resonant tone of a patient, the sounds of the harp comfort and soothe the patient who may be in pain, having difficulty breathing, or experiencing fear and anxiety. The families of these loved ones also benefit from the support of therapeutic harp. The music is like a gentle cradle of soft sound. It is a time when people may experience the beauty of their most cherished melodies with their loved one.

Children in hospital settings, and with other special needs such as developmental disabilities, respond well to the harp. Evidence of a range of healthy outcomes has been recorded. They include appropriate excitement, joy, empowerment, as well as relaxation.

In the Corporate structure, harps have been utilized as part of a stress management program. The results are a "time out" refreshment and centering for employees. Increased concentration and motivation have been reported. We find this to be true for care-givers in hospitals and hospices.

During childbirth, harp music helps to create an atmosphere of love and safety, with the possibility of supporting the rhythm of the mother's breathing.

Interactive work, touching and even learning to play the harp, increases the recipient's physical coordination and concentration. The benefit of a shared activity can also be important.

For people in Intensive Care Units and in Operating Rooms, monitors show that the heart rate decreases and the Oxygenation levels increase when soothing harp music is played. Harp music provides sound or focus other than the humming and beeping of hospital machines.

People who suffer from Alzheimer's Disease often access memory through songs from the past.

Many cases of people coming out of coma have taken place while harp music is being employed.

What Can You Expect From A Practitioner of Therapeutic Harp?

Qualifications

Education: Has met and adheres to the standards of the International Harp Therapy Program and participates in ongoing Professional Development at National Symposiums.

Clinical Internship: Successful completion of a closely supervised internship.

Skills

Musical: Accomplished in harp repertoire and improvisation

Clinical: Practical knowledge of a wide range of study including interpersonal skills and special needs to both acute and long term care.

Practitioners are committed to fostering trust, insuring confidentiality, respectfulness and sensitivity.

Music as a Therapeutic Modality

The beneficial relationship between music and healing has been well established for centuries. Documents dating back to 1500 BC depict Egyptian physicians employing music for healing the sick. In ancient Greece, Pythagoras taught his students ways in which certain musical notes, chords, and melodies could induce physical responses in the body. Early Celtic cultures used music to alter emotional and physical states. Twelfth-century abbess and physician Hildegard von Bingen employed treatments that are much like those now advocated by modern practitioners of holistic medicine.

The use of music as a tool for healing continued in Europe through the 17th century until it began to fall out of favor during the dawn of the Age of Reason. However, current scientific research into the effectiveness of complementary therapies is providing new evidence that music can assist and effect healing. Music can alter brain and body chemistry and affect physiological rhythms such as pulse rate and breathing. It can regulate cortisol levels, facilitate relaxation, and improve immune system functioning. Specific vibrations have been shown to alter DNA and generate healing responses at a cellular level. Music impacts the autonomic nervous system and directly stimulates external nerves in a way similar to acupuncture.

The Harp as a Therapeutic Instrument

Historically, the harp has been a symbol of relief and comfort. The Book of Samuel in Hebrew Scripture speaks of the harp as an instrument of healing. Traditional Christian religious art often depicted angels, considered messengers of God, holding harps.

Because of the harp's construction and its acoustical properties, it produces music that has unique healing properties. The vibrating strings generate high quality resonance across a wide range of pitch. They produce a unique tonal color, distinctive timbre, and clear overtones.

Therapeutic Harp Practitioners use the harp to support recipients' emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual healing and wellbeing. They work in institutional or clinical settings such as an emergency room waiting area where harp music soothes and relaxes patients and family members or in a labor and delivery unit where music supports the rhythm of childbirth. In hospices and palliative care facilities, practitioners

Therapeutic harp practitioners provide important and effective complementary treatment in such places as hospices, oncology infusion units, bone marrow

transplant wards, intensive care units, palliative care units, and pediatric wards. They assist patients preparing for surgery and those in post-operative recovery.

Therapeutic Harp Practitioners serve in hospice and palliative care units where their music supports those who are dying and comforts loved ones. There, they offer patients and family members comfort and help diminish their anxiety, loneliness, fear, and physical and emotional pain. They are active in senior care facilities where music assists memory recall, social interaction, and community building. They also provide support to children with special needs in hospital, school, and residential settings.

Therapeutic harp practitioners who are licensed or trained in other disciplines such as counseling, nursing, medical practice, ministry, massage, occupational, physical, and rehabilitation therapy find effective ways in which bring together their skills as therapeutic harp practitioners and their mastery of their primary discipline in their practice.

Therapeutic Harp Practitioners

Therapeutic Harp Practitioners have met and adhere to the standards of the International Harp Therapy Program (IHTP) and participate in ongoing professional development through national symposiums with the IHTP.

The one-year training program, directed by Christina Tourin and now in its ¹⁶~~sixteenth~~ year, educates harpists in principles of counseling and psychology, music therapy, and resonant kinesiology. The program provides practical knowledge of a wide range of study including interpersonal skills and special needs of both acute and long term care patients. Practitioners gain proficiency using the small harp to utilize the healing energies of sound vibrations and become comfortable using the instrument in health care settings. They build a substantial repertoire and cultivate their improvisational and other technical and musical skills as harpists.

In addition, practitioners must complete an 80-hour supervised internship. During this internship, practitioners may not be paid. Following their completion of the program, it is expected that they will be compensated for their work. Medical foundations, arts councils, and community and individual donors have given generously through grants to health facilities in many areas of the country to support the inclusion of therapeutic harp as a complementary treatment modality.