

Eli's Hospice Insider

STAFFING: Manage Pain and Medication Cost with a Hospice Musician

Could music therapy lower your drug costs?

When he began working for Hospice Partners of the Central Coast, San Luis Obispo, Calif., **Chris O'Connell, BA, CHM**, was the facility's only part-time hospice musician. Now he's joined by two fellow musicians as full-time members of the interdisciplinary team (IDT), and the hospice has garnered some surprising benefits.

Music Eases Suffering

Studies have shown that music helps counter pain and offers physical relaxation and comfort. In his hospice work, O'Connell has seen music alleviate restlessness, agitation, anger, and family discord. One additional benefit of music therapy in hospice is that it impacts both patient and caregiver alike, O'Connell said during a session at the National Association for Hospice and Home Care's (NAHC) annual meeting.

"Music isn't all you need, but music can be a powerful adjunct to conventional therapies, particularly because it touches and affects the patient on so many levels: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Music can offer a profound source of comfort," O'Connell said. "Music offers something beautiful in situations that are otherwise devoid of beauty."

Musicians Add Distinction, Cost Savings

As word about their music therapy program spread, Hospice Partners of the Central Coast found that they were receiving referrals as a direct result. Client satisfaction with the program, which brings the trained musicians to visit hospice patients, is at 100 percent. The music therapy program differentiates Hospice Partners of the Central Coast from their competition.

Including your hospice musicians as part of the IDT also helps keep the group up-to date on how the patient is doing at that moment and what's going on in her life, said **Cindy Myers, MFA, HM**, a fellow hospice musician with Hospice Partners of the Central Coast. The hospice musicians make daily calls to the social workers and keep in touch with the chaplains and case managers -- they are intertwined with the IDT, rather than working in isolation as can happen with contracted musicians.

In an effort to determine the impact of their music therapy program, Hospice Partners of the Central Coast performed a non-scientific study comparing the cost of medication for patients who received music therapy to those who did not. The results were surprising: Patients receiving music therapy used 43 percent fewer drugs. At last tally, drug costs were at \$6.37 per patient day -- including outliers. Patients receiving music therapy also had longer lengths of stay.

Look to Fundraising for Support

Hospice Partners of the Central Coast funds its music therapy with grants.

Pay for programs like these with fundraising, advised **Robert J. Simione** of Simione Consultants in Hamden, Conn. You can't afford to add on programs like art and music therapy if you're losing money, he warned. But Hospice Partners of the Central Coast has found that people like to give money for their music therapy program.

The music therapy program at Big Bend Hospice in Tallahassee, Fla. is 100 percent funded by donations and grants, said CEO **Carla Braveman, RN, MEd, CHCE**. "It's a sexy sell," she said. Pitching fundraisers around music has been a great success for Big Bend -- even inviting other musicians, such as members of the local orchestra, to play in support of the music therapy program has worked well.

