

Editorial

## Special issue on music therapy in the context of dementia

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The demographic global changes in societies, coupled with the increase of life expectancy, have resulted in common disease processes at older ages. Dementia, and Alzheimer's disease (AD) in particular, is considered a health problem of extreme importance. Currently, around 50 million people worldwide have dementia, and it is the seventh leading cause of death [1]. In addition, dementia has significant social and economic implications in terms of direct medical and social care costs, and the costs of informal care, as well.

Most of the care for persons living with dementia is currently provided by family members. As the caring of a loved one can last many years, physical, emotional and financial pressures can cause great stress to families and caregivers, and support is often required from health, social, financial and legal systems [2].

No treatments are currently available to cure or even alter the progressive course of dementia, although numerous new therapies are being investigated and are in various stages of clinical trials [3]. A number of studies have examined pharmacological treatments in dementia, and future research will continue to explore this avenue [4]. However, the adverse and limited effects of drugs have boosted the need for exploration of non-pharmacological therapies. Consideration of therapies' efficacy in helping people affected by the disease and their caregivers, is inclusive of exploring how to manage the symptoms and the potential for slowing the progression of the disease [5].

Music has become very popular and is often recommended for the elderly and in particular for people with dementia and its therapeutic benefits are well established in the care for people with neurocognitive deficits such as Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. The report of the Commission on Music and Dementia [6] highlights the diversity of music activities, besides music therapy, currently offered in the community, hospitals, and residential settings for persons who live with dementia. The report also brings to light the variety of professionals, in addition to music therapists, that conduct this array of music activities (e.g. professional and amateur musicians, volunteers and other health allied professionals). The challenge is to ensure that music is providing a positive benefit whether it is a general

entertainment program, an active engagement program, or addressing a specific treatment goal. In order to guarantee that these programs are properly delivered and that they do not cause negative reactions in people who receive them, they should be informed by best practices from scientific music therapy evidence. In addition, it is important that those who facilitate these music activities have proper training and supervision. This ensures that the interventions are safe and informed in order to warrant desired outcomes. This can be an opportunity for music therapists to collaborate with other non-music therapy professionals, volunteers and caregivers, and to share skills to become potentially involved in a wider context of dementia care [7].

The articles you will find in this Special Edition are the result of 18 months of diligent work by a Special Interest Group (SIG) entitled 'Music therapy in the context of Dementia: People with dementia and their caregivers' resulting from the International Association for Music and Medicine (IAMM) conference. This group is comprised of well-known international music therapy professionals who have developed their clinical and research careers in the area of dementia, thus, becoming experts in the field including Suzanne Hanser, Connie Tomaino, Amy Clements-Cortés, Kendra Ray, Ayelet Dassa, Tereza-Raquel Alcantara da Silva, Shir Moreira and myself.

The articles included herein address the most up-to-date issues music therapists currently might confront and subsequently are faced to manage in their day-to-day work-seeking always to address issues from a scientifically-based perspective.

In her article *Music-based interventions for people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias: A review of the research* Suzanne Hanser begins with a broad overview of systematic reviews and meta-analysis on the effects of music therapy and music-based interventions on people with dementia, along with their family caregivers. Her umbrella review provides a summary of critical findings to take into consideration in evidence-based clinical practice.

In *Foundations of dementia care for music therapy and music-based interventions* Amy Clements-Cortés, Suzanne Hanser and Melissa Mercadal-Brotons identify common needs of people with dementia and how they respond to music connected to brain activity and functioning.

In the next article, *Music therapy and music-based interventions in dementia: Recommendations for clinical guidelines*, Connie Tomaino, Melissa Mercadal Brotons, Tereza Raquel Alcântara Silva and Shirlene Vianna Moreira present the increasing applications of music being used by

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COI statement: The author declared that no financial support was given for the writing of this article. The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

various professionals in the context of dementia. They advocate for the need to establish music-based interventions and music therapy standards based on scientific evidence, ensuring that people who receive treatment through music will obtain the maximum possible benefit.

Ayelet Dassa and Dorit Amir, from Israel, present the results of a beautiful study, *The impact of singing on language abilities among people with Alzheimer's disease in moderate to severe stages*, which opens readers to new intervention strategies that address specific needs, such as language and communication in persons who live with dementia.

In *Evaluating the use of music-assisted caregiving interventions by certified nursing assistants caring for nursing home residents with HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders and depressive symptoms: A mixed methods study*, an interdisciplinary team comprised of Kendray Ray, Girija Kaimal, Ayelet Dassa, Jaime Slaughter and Mary Mittleman report the contributions of training and empowering certified nursing assistants (CAN) in the use of music with a very special population and how it positively impacted the clients and their caregivers in the same way.

Telehealth, a relevant and prevalent topic, which has grown significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, is addressed in the last two articles of this issue. For many people with dementia and their caregivers, social distancing and isolation have unfortunately become a reality as a result of the globally enforced safety precautions. Ayelet Dassa, Kendra Ray and Amy Clements-Cortés, in *Reflections on the challenges of the new (online) music therapy setting for people with dementia*, ponder and consider their practical experiences with telehealth. They expose the challenges they encountered, along with the questions and dilemmas raised during this time. They considered the lessons learned from this new modality of practice with both the people who live with dementia, and their caregivers as well.

In *Telehealth music therapy for persons with dementia and/or caregivers*, Amy Clements-Cortés, Melissa Mercadal-Brotons, Teresa Raquel Alcântara Silva and Shirlene Vianna Moreira, offer practical recommendations, clinical and research examples as well as implications for further research and training that are based on the existent scientific literature on the topic and the authors' own professional experience.

It has been an honor and great pleasure to work with this group of prestigious colleagues who joined together for this Special Interest Group (SIG) at the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Association for Music & Medicine. We want to express our gratitude to Suzanne Hanser, Vera Brandes and

the IAMM 2020 conference scientific committee who accepted our proposal for this SIG.

I also want to thank the journal's Editors-in-Chief, Joanne Loewy & Ralph Spintge as well as the anonymous peer reviewers and those individuals specifically invited to review the papers in this special edition: Alfredo Raglio, Hanne Mette-Ridder, Felicity Baker, Janette Tamplin, Robin Rio, Melita Belgrave, Orii McDermot, Andrea Cevasco-Trotter and all our team.

It is my hope that the articles in this issue will enrich and inspire those of you who are interested in fulfilling the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers, and that this will contribute to improving their quality of life through the art and science of music and the practice of music therapy.

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