

## Music-Assisted Bathing: Making Shower Time Easier for People with Dementia

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### **Abstract:**

It is estimated that 90% of nursing home residents need assistance with bathing. The purpose of this article is to describe a music-assisted care technique that can be used by caregivers when bathing nursing home residents with dementia. Research suggests that music has many therapeutic benefits for people with dementia. Using music to soothe anxiety can be an effective intervention to assist with lessening of agitation during activities of daily living, especially bathing. This article will provide nursing and direct care staff tools to successfully conduct the music-assisted bathing protocol. Consideration for choosing appropriate music for bathing, the creation of individualized personalized playlists, and acknowledgement of desired outcomes are presented. Incorporating music-assisted bathing may address neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia by lessening agitation and improving mood, which in turn can increase job satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Nursing | Older Adults | Gerontological Nursing | Music Assisted Care | Music Assisted Bathing | Dementia

### **Article:**

*Ruth (pseudonym) is a resident at a nursing and rehabilitation facility in New York State. She is an English-speaking, Brooklyn native who has a diagnosis of mid-late-stage dementia. Like many mornings, when she was approached at shower time, she immediately became verbally aggressive toward her normally assigned certified nursing assistant (CNA). The music therapist suggested to the CNA that she should redirect the subject to Ruth's favorite song. The CNA remembered that she had observed Ruth's son singing songs by Frank Sinatra that had appeared to relax her. The music therapist located Frank Sinatra's "I Have Dreamed" on her iPod® and began to play the song.*

*Immediately, Ruth began to smile and hum along with the music. The CNA used this opportunity to convince Ruth that it was shower time. She explained that the music would be brought along to be listened to during the shower. The music therapist accompanied both Ruth and the CNA to*

*a room adjacent to where Ruth received her shower. For the next 15 minutes, the CNA and Ruth sang and hummed, "I Have Dreamed," "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," and "That's Amore" while the shower was given. Following the shower, Ruth appeared calm and exchanged pleasantries with residents and staff. Her CNA reported that Ruth actually enjoyed the shower. In her words, "That was wonderful." Since then, a personalized playlist based on the songs played during this time has been created for her CNA to use during Ruth's shower time.*

## **Background**

Bathing is one of the most complex activities of daily living when caring for a person with dementia. With 90% of all nursing home residents requiring assistance in this area, this undertaking should be acknowledged (Rader et al., 2006). Nursing home residents in general often exhibit resistance to care during bathing that may result in aggressive and agitated behaviors (Sloane et al., 2004). Situations such as these can result in an unpleasant experience for both the person being showered and the caregiver.

Dementia is becoming a common diagnosis in nursing homes in the United States. In fact, approximately 50% of residents in nursing homes have a diagnosis of dementia (Lithgow, Jackson, & Browne, 2012). It is estimated that approximately two thirds of nursing home residents with dementia experience clinically significant neuropsychiatric symptoms such as agitation (Lawlor, 2004). The combination of dementia with agitation compounds the difficulty of bathing for caregivers. The management of these symptoms during activities of daily living such as bathing and showering may be diminished with the use of personalized music.

Research suggests the use of nonpharmacological methods to help reduce agitation during bathing. Programs that involve training caregivers to utilize person-focused procedures have been found to be successful in reducing agitation and aggression (Sloane et al., 2004). In addition, symptoms may improve in older adults when bathing in a fashion in which he or she is accustomed. This could mean adapting the manner in which the shower is given (Deguchi et al., 1999). Adding music to the shower is an ideal approach, as it is not an uncommon, past behavior for people to listen to music while bathing.

## **Literature Review**

Music has many therapeutic benefits for people with dementia (Guétin et al., 2009; Kumar et al., 1999; Svansdottir & Snaedal, 2006). It is not a cure, but has been shown to decrease neuropsychiatric symptoms. Multiple meta-analyses have determined that music therapy is a safe, humane intervention, yielding outcomes that are similar to those of regularly prescribed psychiatric interventions (Brotons & Koger, 2000; Opie, Rosewarne, & O'Connor, 1999; Sherrat, Thornton, & Hatton, 2004).

It is plausible that the benefits of music therapy are transferable when providing activities of daily living, such as bathing. Small changes during bathing can improve the experience for the

person with dementia (Flori, 2007). One way is to reduce stimuli by playing music to provide a distraction not only from the facility noises but also from any feelings of displeasure that may occur during bathing. Using music to soothe anxiety can be effective by diverting psychological responses (Bradshaw, Donaldson, Jacobson, Nakamura, & Chapman, 2011). Although music therapy has been found to soothe anxiety and effectively divert psychological responses among people with dementia, to date, no comprehensive protocol has been developed using music to assist in bathing nursing home residents with dementia.

### **Music Therapy at MJHS**

Metropolitan Jewish Health System (MJHS) supports the health services and facilities of almost a dozen participating agencies and programs throughout Greater Metropolitan New York. This integrated health system offers the following services: adult day health care, home care, hospice, palliative care, skilled nursing facilities, Medicaid, and Medicare health coverage.

At MJHS, the music therapy department has worked closely with nurses in the skilled nursing facilities to develop a protocol that may help relax and create a more enjoyable experience during bathing. The purpose of this article is to describe a music-assisted care technique that can be used by caregivers during bathing in nursing homes.

MJHS's innovative music therapy program utilizes a multidisciplinary care planning process led by music therapists, aided and supplemented by direct care staff, to provide individualized and small-group music-based activities. The program, designed specifically for nursing home residents with moderate to severe dementia who exhibit symptoms of agitation, wandering, or depression, is currently being implemented and evaluated. With a 3-year grant from the New York State Department of Health, MJHS has created training protocols that have been disseminated to nursing homes throughout New York State. The MJHS music therapy team developed six protocols. Three protocols are to be used with specific activities of daily living: music-assisted bathing, wound care, and range of motion. This article will provide nursing and direct care staff tools to successfully conduct the music-assisted bathing protocol.

### **Implementing Music-Assisted Bathing**

It is important to provide music that brings comfort to the resident being prepared for a bath. Consideration must be given to cultural background, tempo, volume, and mood of the person with dementia. The meaning of a song can influence one's perspective and reaction depending on his or her culture (Stige, 2002). The tone and tempo of music selected can affect the emotional response. Also, the choice of song may evoke feelings of anger, sadness, or happiness (Quinto, Thompson, & Keating, 2013). These details emphasize the necessity of creating a personalized playlist for the music and bathing experience (Figure 1).

**[Figure 1 is Omitted from this Formatted Document]**

The choice of music is equally important as attention to the warmth of the water when providing music-assisted bathing. Sensitivity to these issues could be the difference between a pleasurable or uncomfortable experience. Caregivers can survey residents' favorite music by consulting with social work or recreation staff. Many times residents will share a couple of their favorite songs, and a compilation of songs/playlist can be created based on just a few. A CD or iPod playlist based on the resident's personal preference should be created for every individual prior to shower time with consideration given to information gathered during the music survey.

### **Adding Music to Bathing for Individuals with Dementia**

Nursing staff should begin by considering who will receive the shower, the desired outcomes, and safety of equipment. Someone with dementia who historically has resisted being bathed or showered, a resident who displays aggressive behaviors, and one who enjoys music will be appropriate for this protocol. A clear desired outcome from adding music to bathing is improved mood. Typical simultaneous responses to the music intervention may include decreased physical tension, relaxation, and a reduction in aggressive behaviors. CNAs have often reported their residents being less resistant to bathing as demonstrated by relaxed facial expressions, smiling, and less tension in muscles. Residents often verbalize that they enjoyed listening and singing along with their favorite songs. Finally, it is necessary to consider safety when using a CD or iPod with portable speakers. Preferably, each should be placed in an area that is waterproofed and disconnected from an electrical outlet. A simultaneous response to the music intervention may be decreased physical tension, relaxation, and a reduction in aggressive behaviors. Finally, it is necessary to consider safety when using a CD player or iPod with portable speakers. Preferably, each should be placed in an area that is waterproofed and disconnected from an electrical outlet.

A prepared set-up will help a music-assisted care program thrive. Before the resident is taken to the shower room, staff should finalize playlists and plan for use of music (Figure 2). If possible, the music should be set up to play in the resident's room and also where the bath or shower will occur. This will ensure continuity of care. Next, the CD player or iPod with portable speakers should be turned on, adjusting the volume to match the resident's preferred listening level. While preparing the resident to go into the shower room, the staff member should explain that the music will be playing in the shower room as well. During the bath or shower, it is important to pay attention to the resident's verbal and nonverbal responses to the music, adjusting the music as needed.

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### **Implications**

This protocol is meant to be shared with CNAs and family caregivers so that this technique can be transferred when the resident is discharged home. Incorporating music-assisted care techniques such as music and bathing may address neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia by

lessening agitation and improving mood, which in turn can increase job satisfaction. It is a win-win for nursing home residents and care staff contributing to quality of life and quality of care for healthy aging.

## Conclusion

Bathing nursing home residents can be an uncomfortable experience for nursing home residents diagnosed with dementia and their caregivers. Music's therapeutic effect has been associated with calming and soothing feelings of disturbance and restlessness (Bradshaw et al., 2011). Adding music-assisted bathing into the activities of daily living routine may assist in lessening of aggressive and agitated behaviors exhibited prior to and during bathing. The field of gerontological nursing could be greatly influenced through the use of this intervention by empowering nurses, CNAs, and other direct care staff to provide this effective nonpharmacological approach to bathing.

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