

It is Time for the CBT Songs: Music as a Medium to Deliver Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

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Rec date: Feb 4, 2016; Acc date: Feb 5, 2016; Pub date: Feb 8, 2016

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Editorial

The results of a national poll of listeners to a popular British music station in 2004 suggested that, the best way to ameliorate one's depressive symptoms musically is to listen to 'I Know It's Over' by Smiths [1]. This is hardly surprising. We are all aware of the healing power of music. Music therapy groups are popular among staff and the users of psychiatric services, and are often funded by the public health services. In their Cochrane review to find out whether therapeutic use of music is effective in reducing the symptoms of depression, Maratos, et al. [2] found only five studies that met their inclusion criteria. Due to the marked variations in interventions, the populations studied, and the outcome measures, it was not possible to conduct the meta-analysis. However, it was reported that four of these studies reported some improvement in depression among those who received music therapy.

More RCTs have been published during the last 8 years. In addition to depression and anxiety disorders, music therapy has been reported to be of some effect for psychotic symptoms [3]. However, currently music therapy is not included in any evidence based guidelines. It's not just because of lack of robust evidence, but also due to a lack of theoretical underpinning of this therapy. It is not surprising that, Maratos's thought provoking article a few years later was titled "Music therapy for depression: It seems to work, but how?" [4]. We therefore suggest that, while it is important to attempt to discover the underlying therapeutic processes that heal emotions, there is no harm in trying to use music as a media to deliver evidence based and theory driven interventions that heal emotions.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is certainly the most suitable candidate in this regard. CBT has been well established as an effective treatment of depression and anxiety [5], and is recommended by the national guidelines in most developed countries. CBT can be provided both in individual and group format. It has also been tried in brief, self-help and guided self-help formats [6,7], and using a variety of media, including paper and electronic.

The Way Forward

Both self-help and the guided self-help formats can be easily adapted to deliver CBT in group settings, using music as a medium of

delivery. It has been suggested that the use of music could become a motivator, inspirer, reinforcement, or even 'seducer' to psychotherapy [8]. However, so far no attempts have been made to use music as a medium to deliver CBT. Delivering CBT through music is achievable if the song writers can write lyrics that convey the basic concepts of self-help material in structured sessions. These songs can then be sung along with other activities in a music group setting. Homework exercises can be easily modified to be used along with these groups. We believe this approach can help in developing an intervention that is; not just grounded in theory that underpins evidence based psychological interventions, but is also repeatable and testable across situations, using methodologically sound RCTs.

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