

Introducing...

The Alzheimer's Association, NYC Chapter is pleased to introduce a brand new newsletter for families and friends of residents of NYC nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. So much good work is going on in facilities all over the country, we think a newsletter will be an excellent way to share experiences and ideas for improving the care provided to people with dementia. Anyone interested in receiving our free newsletter via e-mail can do so by going to careADvocate@alzny.org and signing up for the online version.

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We welcome your suggestions for articles and encourage your feedback. We will share information about resources (books, movies, online materials), and news about upcoming conferences and programs. If you have ideas for the newsletter, e-mail careADvocate@alzny.org or call (646) 744-2963.

Reconnecting with Musical Memories: The Song Remembers When

No matter what our age, it's a safe assumption that music plays a significant role in our lives. From the earliest nursery rhymes we learned as toddlers through the rebellious teenage years and on to romantic and family relationships over the decades, hearing a familiar melody can instantly bring us back to another time and place.

Long-term care facilities are well aware of its benefits, often scheduling a variety of musical entertainment programs for residents. But some people with Alzheimer's may lose the capacity to understand or distinguish various sounds in their environment, leading to more confusion or agitation; and they may have difficulty with appreciating music in a group setting. Additionally, they may not like or be familiar with the styles of music played in the facility.

Research on the brains of people with dementia, however, has shown that, even when someone is no longer able to communicate verbally, he or she will still respond to favorite music, often dramatically. Many people witnessed this firsthand recently when a video of Henry, an elderly nursing home patient, went viral on YouTube (<http://tiny.cc/musicandmemory>). Dr. Connie Tomaino, world-renowned pioneer and leader in music therapy, has conducted a significant body of research in this area over the last 30 years. As she describes it:

"Most times, people with Alzheimer's have trouble with didactic memory—facts, names, places, what we call things. What they don't lose is a sense of familiarity with something...Emotional memories are very well preserved in Alzheimer's Disease—love, affection, etc., so songs that carry those emotional memories are the best retained...The amazing thing is that people can't recall other information, but they can sing along with the lyrics."

Obviously, the optimal solution to reconnecting persons with Alzheimer's with beloved musical memories would be to provide their favorite music at desired times. That might seem a daunting task for nursing homes and caregivers. However, that didn't stop Dan Cohen, a Long Island social worker who, in 2006, envisioned creating iPod playlists for residents of a local nursing facility. When this proved tremendously successful, reducing agitation, improving behavior,





Institute for Music and Neurologic Function (IMNF)

www.musictherapy.imnf.org
For more information on the programs and services offered, email imnf@centerlight.org


COBBLE HILL
health center


www.cobblehill.org
For more information, contact Louise Dueno at 718-855-6789 or email ldueno@cobblehill.org

NY State Dept. of Health's Electronic Dementia Guide for Excellence (EDGE)

Recommendation for individualized music interventions, with guidelines and suggestions.
<http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/dementia/edge/>

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mood and social interaction, he set out to formalize the program, establishing Music and Memory, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life by mainstreaming and promoting the use of personalized digital music. As he puts it:

“When people are no longer speaking or recognizing their relatives, play the right song, and they will sing the words to just about perfect rhythm...their eyes will open up, and they’ll be happy. Everything will stop around them because everyone will be enjoying watching someone have that reaction.”

At this point, there can be no denying that the program works. The Music and Memory program is currently in 50 nursing homes and continues to expand rapidly.

How to Get Started

As an initial step, you may inquire whether the facility already has an iPod program in place for residents. If they do, see if your relative can participate—you can help provide input on musical selections. Once your relative is connected to an iPod and their favorite music, you might also like to incorporate some music into your visits, so that you can enjoy the pleasure your relative receives from the music.

If the facility does not have an iPod program already set up, there are a couple of things you can do. First, of course, you can bring an iPod from home and try it out. The key is creating a playlist that your relative will love. See if they are able to tell you their favorite artists or styles of music. If necessary, ask other family members and friends if they can remember what artists or types of music your loved one enjoyed. You should assess your relative’s ability to handle the listening device, e.g., know how to click the “Play/Pause” button on and off. You and/or a staff member may need to aid your relative. Involving the Nursing Assistant who cares for your relative, or someone from the Activities Department, could also be very helpful.

Try to assemble between 80 and 100 songs (10-15 artists) initially. Timing is also important. You may even want to consider setting up more than one playlist for different times of the day and different moods and plan a regular schedule. It has been shown that those with Alzheimer’s disease will be more alert, engaged and talkative if familiar music is played regularly month after month.

Another option is to speak with the Director of Activities, and enlist their support in introducing the iPod to your relative. Nursing homes are always looking for ways to meaningfully engage residents in activities, and for people with dementia, music can be one of the few truly effective options. When you introduce the iPod idea, connect them to the Music and Memory website, so they can see videos of people with dementia enjoying music, and where they can also see videos of Administrators and other Activity Directors sharing information on how they set up their iPod programs.

The bottom line for all concerned: Easier interactions, less resistance to care and transitions, plus the enjoyment and reward of seeing relative one doing better and responding to the positive power of the music. It is truly heartening to see musical memories help your relative maintain his or her identity when other connections may be fading or gone. As Dan Cohen so aptly summarizes: “It’s a big win—people are stimulated, engaged, more alert for longer periods of time and want to share the music, creating a real spike in social interaction.”