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We Play Music as We Die: Firsthand Insights into the Importance of Music Therapy for End-of-Life Care

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We are taught about the wonders of birth and healthy living from a young age. We learn about the miracle of conception, gestation, and birth. We learn about the importance of nutritious and balanced diets and physical exercise for maintaining a healthy body. But, we are not taught about death; the final phase of all our lives whether healthy or otherwise. The process of dying is still an enigma and even taboo in some cultures and religions.

Needless to say, all humans must face this final phase in their lives--without exception. Intriguingly, close inspection of the world's cultures and religions through the ages shows that music plays an important role at funerals across all cultural and religious beliefs. Consequently, the question arises whether music has an important role prior to death, namely, in the process of dying, and in particular the unique role of music therapy for end-of-life-care in palliative and hospice settings in the 21st century.

This presentation explores the relationship between death and music for terminally ill patients undergoing music therapy. Throughout the presenter's internship experience in hospice settings in New York City, she was intrigued by the psychological changes and transitions of hospice patients, as well as the effects of music therapy on the end of life phase.

Based on her observations and personal experiences, this presentation describes the importance of music therapy interventions in hospice settings, with emphasis on the positive effects of music making during the process of dying, and how music acts as a catalyst for terminally ill patients as they meet the challenges of integrating and transitioning from their old, healthy selves to their new, dying selves. The conclusion of this presentation is that musical experiences and the process of dying have important similarities. Importantly, the author believes that the emotions experienced by end-of-life patients who embrace the multidimensional aspects of music during the final phase of life is a powerful means for

supporting terminally ill patients in hospice settings to find a new identity at the end of life.