



**TITLE:**

***“That song understood”; “I completely lost interest in music”*: Music’s place in psycho-oncology**

Sometimes finding words to talk about cancer is too hard, people don’t want to talk, or one feels that no-one can understand. For many though, music “understands” and promotes endurance when experiencing pain and uncertainty, and connection with healthy self-concepts, spiritual realms, and joy. People can project onto music what is needed because music can be ascribed human, physical, emotional and transporting properties. Within a music therapy relationship, patients and families can engage in a creative space which may transform adverse cancer experiences as: new awareness is inspired by song; thoughts evolve and are communicated through song writing; playful musicality is discovered and expressed in music improvisation and dance; and meaningful musical moments and memories are shared. Music therapists may also enable significant connections with those who are cognitively impaired because music and language use separate neural pathways. Some, however, avoid music because of intense emotions elicited and internal chaos identified with cancer-related loss.

Psycho-oncology deals with psychological reactions of patients with cancer and their families, stresses on staff, and psychosocial and behavioural factors associated with coping and survival. Research findings and stories about music in psycho-oncology will be woven through a presentation illuminating how music and music therapy can improve the quality of life of many people in all age groups affected by cancer. Implications for healthcare workers wanting to helpfully offer music or support those needing to avoid music after cancer diagnoses will be presented.

**BIOGRAPHY:**

Clare O’Callaghan PhD is a Music Therapist at Caritas Christi Hospice, St Vincent’s Hospital, and the Senior Research Associate in Palliative Care at Cabrini Health, Australia. In 2008-9 Clare examined music’s role in cancer experiences as an Australian National Health and Medical Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellow in Palliative Care. Originally a social worker, Clare became a music therapist in 1985 after completing her training at The

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre, New York. Clare is particularly interested in translating clinicians' practice experiences into professional knowledge through working as a therapist-researcher and through clinician-researcher partnerships. Her research is widely published in palliative care, psycho-oncology, medical, social work, and music therapy refereed journals and textbooks. Clare holds honorary titles as Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, St Vincent's Hospital, The University of Melbourne, and Fellow, Department of Cancer Experiences Research, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, where she also worked as a music therapist from 1998 to 2012. Currently, Clare works as a music therapist with patients with advanced illnesses and their families, is supervising PhD students examining music therapy in paediatric palliative care and nature's role in cancer experiences, and collaborates on numerous interdisciplinary research projects. One project is examining arts based modalities, including music, in palliative pastoral care.