

VOL.81 NO.2 March 2008 \$5.00

# SAN FRANCISCO MEDICINE

JOURNAL OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Music*



*and Medicine*

## Soothing the Sick with Sound

Music at Stanford Hospital

Greg Kaufman

A middle-aged man enters Stanford Hospital's Cancer Center for a second opinion consultation with the Tumor Board. He has never been to Stanford Hospital before and his apprehension as to what the prognosis may reveal is palpable.

As he enters the building, he is surprised to notice the lack of clinical ambience—it seems more like an upscale hotel than a medical clinic. He walks down the hallway, noticing the waiting areas are warmly lit with flat-screen panels displaying peaceful scenes from nature. He hears beautiful harp music and, as he turns a corner, he sees a musician perched on the edge of a sofa playing her instrument. He approaches slowly and tells her the music is wonderful, and that he's never experienced anything like this in a hospital. She nods, thanks him, and responds she hears that quite often. For a moment, his anxiety is gone.

This is the Stanford Hospital Music Program in action. Its mission is simple: to integrate music as a primary element of the health care offered. Its commitment is to make Stanford Hospital a more comfortable, soothing, and healing environment for patients, family, and staff through music.

And its results are undeniable, uplifting, therapeutic, and personal.

### Concerts in the Atrium

The Stanford Hospital Music Program, which is part of Guest Services, was created in 1992 as a weekly concert for patients' family and staff. Since that time, the Music Program has expanded its services. It now provides concerts twice a week in the Stanford Hospital Atrium, plus music six days a week on the units at Stanford Hospital and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital.

Ambient piano, guitar, and harp music in the Cancer Center and weekly concerts for transplant families are also part of the Stanford Music Program. A summer outdoor concert series and an additional ambient piano day were added to the Cancer Center's schedule in June 2007.

"Live music is becoming a regular feature in the life and care of patients and residents in hospitals, homes, hospices, etc. throughout the U.K.," wrote Sylvia Lindsay in the *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*.

"The response to music is intensely individual, depending on many factors such as age, culture, and upbringing," she says. "However, it is evident that music can bring emotional release, revive memories, and act as a means of communication beyond words."

The centerpiece of the Stanford Hospital Music Program is the Bing Music Series. This series provides concerts every Wednesday and Friday afternoon from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. Open to all patients, visitors, and staff, these concerts are performed by professional musicians covering a variety of genres, including classical, ethnic, jazz, popular, folk, and choral.

The concerts are held in the Hospital Atrium, a large indoor area surrounded by beautiful outdoor gardens and decorated with contemporary artwork. The audience is given a brief overview of the music services available to them, all free of charge, before the concerts start. They are also invited to write down any impressions they have in a comment book provided at each concert to document the positive effects the music has on its listeners.

### Music for Recovery and Communication

The effects of the music on patients, their families, and the musicians themselves are heartfelt and moving.

One patient, Anne, was recovering from heart surgery at Stanford Hospital. She became restless after a week in bed. But throughout her stay, there were two bright spots in her week: visits from her family and the twice-weekly concerts.

Every Wednesday and Friday at 12:30 p.m., Anne looked forward to a professional ensemble performing in the Atrium, a large public area on the ground floor surrounded by outdoor gardens viewed through large picture windows. On this day it was Eric & the In-Crowd, a wonderful jazz and pop standards band that has been performing at Stanford for nine years. Eric had recently been named "Piano Man '07" by *San Francisco Magazine* and his booking calendar was full, but he always made time to perform in the Bing Music Series at Stanford Hospital.

Eric had seen firsthand the benefits his music provided the attendees. His attitude was mirrored by most of the performers who are a part of this series. They see the difference it makes to bring live music to a healing environment.

Jeff Buenz, one of Stanford Hospital's house musicians, relates this story: "As I walked onto the unit, a nurse asked me 'if I could play for the girl in room 33.'

"I went to the room and saw this little girl, perhaps five or six years old, crying and screaming alone in her bed. As I began to play calming music, I could immediately see her crying turn to whimpers, then silence. She then lay still and simply stared at me as I continued to play.

"The nurses gave me a thumbs-up," Jeff  
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continues, "and I knew that the music had been a positive force for this little girl.

"When I finished the first piece, I asked the girl if she liked the music. She stared at me for several seconds and then gave a barely visible single nod of her head. I started playing 'A Whole New World' and asked her if she knew the piece. She continued with her contented stare.

"It's so beautiful to experience the magical way music can calm someone. She never took her eyes off me as I played several more familiar songs for her, including 'Under the Sea' and music from *Toy Story*.

"I played for another fifteen or twenty minutes. As I got up to leave, she nodded two times without further expression."

The other five house musicians' stories related similar calming effects on their listeners, regardless of age, nationality, or even musical tastes. Examples of stress and anxiety reduction experienced by patients, families, and staff are cited through their anecdotes—as are other important benefits, such as helping with end-of-life transitions, providing motivation, and improving communication.

Many of the comments revealed the profound effects the attendees experienced while listening to the music, from temporary relief of their depression to cathartic resolution in accepting their condition or that of a family member.

Stanford Hospital contracts six musicians who perform throughout the hospital six days a week. They provide ambient music in waiting or admitting areas and also

visit bedside to perform for patients who are unable to attend a concert or who just prefer the privacy of a live musical experience. The musicians will often develop a relationship with long-term patients, and many of these patients cite the healing and stress-reducing effects these visits bring.

### **Solace at the End of Life**

The musicians are often requested to assist during the dying process, their presence bringing solace to the patients and their families.

"One day, as I was walking through the back hallways, I saw Susan, one of the chaplains at Stanford Hospital," says harpist Barbra Telynor. "Susan explained to me that there was a group of family members gathered in a nearby room, saying goodbye to their loved one, who was critically ill. I asked Susan if they would like to have some music.

"After I set up in the room, I played quietly in the corner as family members took turns holding their beloved's hand, wiping his brow, kissing him on the forehead. A few days later, Susan and I met up again. She said the whole family had expressed to her how helpful and supportive the music had been."

While no situation is typical, patients and their families are consistently appreciative of the music and its positive effects.

The benefits of music in a healing environment have long been recognized in many cultures, and programs like Stanford's are gaining popularity worldwide.


### **The Importance of Live Performance**

"Experience has shown that a live performance is infinitely more valuable than the finest recording: it enables the listener to cross the line between just hearing something and becoming totally involved in the more active pursuits of listening and participating," writes Lindsay in the *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*.

"At Coppercliff Hospice, Brighton, a member of staff stated, 'I believe we underestimate the value of music.' The positive results thus far have made all the staff aware of this and of the need for us to provide more music. Live artists provide that special atmosphere," writes Lindsay.

An important feature of a live performance is the visual aspect, watching instruments being played. Of equal significance are the warmth, communication, and presentation skills of the musicians, who are able to move within the audience, adjusting the music at a moment's notice and singing or playing individual requests.

Music reinforces a sense of time and place, increases physical output, stimulates those who lack motivation, and brings relaxation.

With the generous support of donors and sponsors, the Stanford Hospital Music Program will continue to provide these most important services to its patients, staff, and visitors. 

*Greg Kaufman is the director of Stanford's music program.*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The San Francisco Medical Society would like to welcome the following new members:

### ACTIVE REGULAR MEMBERS

*Paul Abramson, MD—Online Application*

*Roderick Pettis, MD—Online Application*

*Allan Treadwell, MD—Online Application  
Referred by Steve Fugaro, MD*