

SUMMER 2008
VOLUME 16, NUMBER 3

The Official Publication of the National Association Directors of Nursing Administration in Long Term Care
DIRECTOR

2008 Opryland, June 21-25
Nashville, Tennessee

**NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

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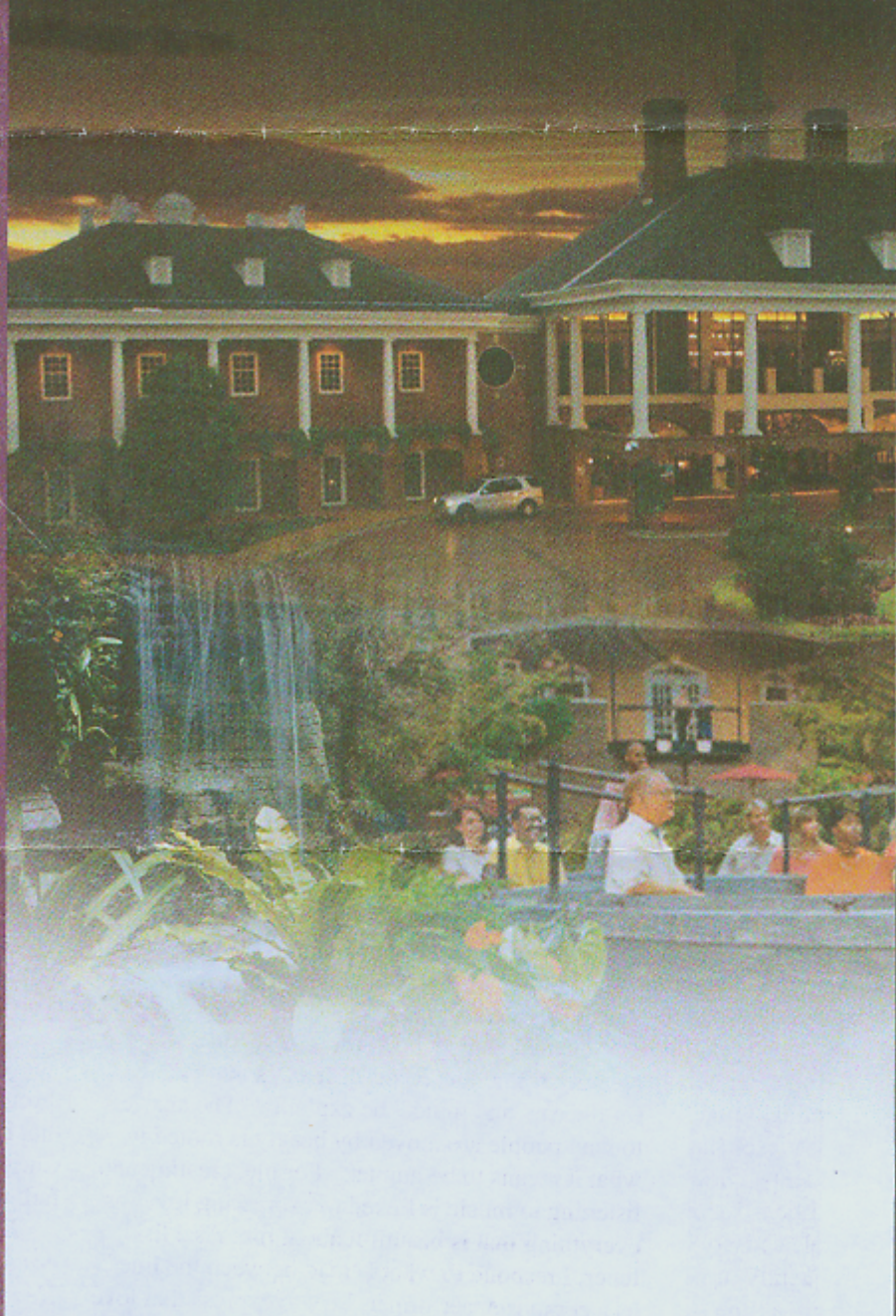
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The Power of Music to Comfort and Heal

by Ed Newman

To the hurting soul every bitter moment is an eternity. Until the music begins. As the music unfolds, we are comforted.

Who can understand it, this miracle that music brings? For many at life's end, whether ill or simply bed-ridden, time slows to a crawl. In fact, with little to look forward to, there really is nothing but time. The hours stand still, especially when magnified by pain. Time is impossibly slow for those who hurt or grieve.

Music has long been understood to have power to comfort distress, to deliver us from the solitude of our sufferings. In the Old Testament, David the shepherd boy was brought before King Saul to play the harp, thereby relieving the king from his depression. Three thousand years later, we have CD players and radios. In whatever form it is delivered, the simple beauty of music is a therapeutic wonder.

Activity directors and nursing professionals at hospitals and nursing homes have long recognized the role music plays in their patients' care. According to Bryan Rife, Activity Director at the Rehab and Nursing Center in Monroe, NC, music can play an important role in healing. "Often, residents in nursing home settings become depressed and withdrawn from the world, mostly because they are forgotten by the loved ones who placed them there. An activity department has such a huge responsibility to help these individuals become less depressed and withdrawn through different types of pleasant and meaningful activities. One element that we use here is music," Rife explained. "You can go into a resident's room who is withdrawn and depressed and have playing some type of up lifting song and they become alive with joy! It is amazing how much music impacts our lives on a daily basis. Music just makes you feel good when nothing else will!"

Barbara Stricsek, Alzheimers Care Director at the Golden Living Center in Murraysville PA, affirmed the same. "In dementia care, everything is about routine," she said. "We use music familiar to residents. During exercise periods they use jazzy upbeat music. Soothing music sets the tone for quieting down."

Stricsek has seen music of all types make an impact on residents. "Show tunes, Lawrence Welk.... For me, a favorite time is seeing residents respond to country western. The whole activity room comes alive." At the end of the day she frequently turns to the music of Henry Wiens for winding down, a time she refers to as "sundowning."

Henry Wiens, a Midwest pianist, recording artist and founder of Quiet Heart Music, is not "just another piano player." After years of receiving letters and calls from grateful listeners coping with grief, chronic pain, and stress, Henry recognized that his music had significant healing potential and began to distribute his CDs to nursing homes, hospices and hospitals across the nation.

Early Awareness

Henry Wiens' musical career as a pianist, arranger, and composer began in the country church his father pastored. His gifts of improvisation flowered there as he began to combine traditional gospel music with many other styles. He later refined these talents by studying music theory and composition at the University of Minnesota.

Wiens' wide-ranging musical credits include arranging scores of recordings for a broad variety of artists, performing ragtime piano for "Sesame Street Live," co-writing three nationally published musicals, and composing music for radio and television, as well as published choral music. He has now recorded seven solo piano CDs and has performed extensively throughout the country.

"Several times," said Wiens, "I've been asked to play for the MN Funeral Director's Association's annual 'service of remembrance.' In this annual service they honor those in their profession who have died in the past year. I think it's significant that they want me there and recognize that my music is in tune with those who grieve."

Many readers of *The Director* first encountered Wiens' music at NADONA's state conventions in Minnesota, Michigan and South Carolina or the national convention in Las Vegas where every registrant received a free sample CD and brochure. In whatever manner the first introduction was made, it is the lasting impression left by his music that keeps people coming back.

Quiet Consolation

Wiens' mission with Quiet Heart Music (www.heartmusic.com) has been to create comforting solo piano CDs which are personalized with the name of an organization (nursing home, hospice, etc) or with the name of a deceased patient/resident. The former would involve a wholesale quantity and the latter would be literally one at a time, as the need arises. This is generally used as an alternative for sending flowers to the family.

According to psychologist Dr. Lisa Wiens, his wife and strong supporter, "It's always comforting when someone paces with us instead of hurrying us on."

"While creating the arrangements I try to put myself in that frame of mind, imagining a listener who seemingly has nothing but time," Henry noted.

What Wiens learned intuitively has been well documented, supported by decades of research. Organizations like the American Music Therapy Association (<http://www.musictherapy.org/>) have grown up around the desire to promote awareness for and the utilization of music "to address the physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs of individuals of all ages." Music therapy has been proven to be useful in the management of stress, to alleviate pain, express feelings, promote rehabilitation and even enhance memory.

In Alzheimers care it is almost impossible to not be awed by what music can do. People remember words to songs when they have forgotten literally everything else, including the ability to speak. Rife stated, "I am always fascinated by Alzheimer's disease and how each case of it is different in each person. I will never forget the moment when I was working with a resident in the latter stages of Alzheimers disease...she never responded to anything really that I done, however, when I played music she would tap the big toe on her left foot. I've always thought that was amazing how they seem to always respond to music."

This healing power of music has been documented from ancient times in both the Hebrew scriptures and the writings of Greek philosophers including Plato, who wrote, "Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul." A little over sixty years ago the first formal music therapy degree program was introduced at Michigan State University in 1944. The American Music Therapy Association was created in 1998 when the National Association for Music Therapy united with the American Association for Music Therapy.

The power of music is not just a Western phenomenon. Music plays a powerful role in every culture. Witness the rise of interest in "world music" at Barnes & Noble and Amazon CD offerings. Being wired for music is part of being human.

Part of music's power comes from the connections it brings. According to Wiens, "Hearing a familiar melody will bring past experiences to life. For example, hearing a song

that you danced to when you were 18 and in love will probably elicit some of those good feelings even decades later. Hearing a song that was sung in church while you were held on your mother's lap may bring comfort the rest of your life."

Oliver Sacks confirms these observations in his recent bestseller, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. In the preface he states that "much of what is heard during one's early years is engraved on the brain for the rest of one's life. Our auditory systems, our nervous systems are indeed exquisitely tuned for music." Why people are so remarkably sensitive to music or why music has such power to connect with our deepest inner circuitry, we do not know. Nor do we know the "why" of why music is so therapeutic. We only know that these connections are being researched with deep earnestness.

But whether we learn "why" matters little to most of us. The fact is, music comforts us. Especially the music Wiens has been producing. Here are just a few of the countless letters he has received since he began producing CDs under "The Quiet Heart" banner.

From a grieving mother: "The music from 'The Quiet Heart' has been a healing balm to my spirit. After the death of my son at age 19, I listened to this music daily, and found comfort and strength. After 6 years 'The Quiet Heart' still refreshes my spirit like a spring rain."

From a grief and loss consultant: "Henry Wiens' soothing and relaxing improvisations on 'The Quiet Heart', have a unique way of quieting and speaking to one's soul. His sensitive and unique musical touch provides the listener an oasis of contemplation that leaves them refreshed and comforted."

From a hospital's Director of Spiritual Care: "In our hospital we play 'The Quiet Heart' on our closed circuit patient TV system. The purpose of this channel is to create a quiet healing environment in each patient's room. Henry Wiens' solo piano music lifts the spirit, calms the soul, and relaxes the patient, thus quickening their healing."

According to Rife, "Our residents benefit from Quiet Heart Music in so many ways. We have residents who will come to our office and request a CD player or head phones and they will want instrumental music. We provide them with the player and always Quiet Heart Music. Every time they bring it back to us they always say how beautiful it was

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and I introduce them to the other CD 's we have."

Wiens is very deliberate in his approach to creating music that heals. "Music is like beauty for the ears and mind," he explains. "The answer to why people are moved by beauty is rooted in what it means to be human. For me, creating and listening to music is linked to expressing love for everything that is beautiful about life. As a listener, I respond to what I 'read between the lines' as a composer-performer, I try to express that love and beauty to others. Any power that music may have to touch others is rooted in the authenticity

and depth of the artist's expression."

Wiens has devoted himself to becoming a finely tuned instrument in expressing that beauty through the medium of a piano. No small wonder that his music is so evocative, so healing. As Hans Christian Anderson once observed, "Where words fail, music speaks."

Ed Newman is a freelance writer from Northern Minnesota. For more information on Quiet Heart Music, visit www.quietheartmusic.com or call 1-800-252-5954.

CMS Announces rate year 2009 payment and policy changes for long-term care hospitals

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) today published the final regulation establishing rate year (RY) 2009 Federal payment rates and policies for long-term care hospitals (LTCHs), a step that ensures that some of the most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries continue to receive high quality care from their long-term care hospitals (LTCHs), while helping to ensure the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund. The nearly 400 LTCHs across the nation are acute care hospitals that treat some of Medicare's most severely ill or medically complex patients.

"The policies we are announcing today will help to ensure access to high quality services in an inpatient setting for people with Medicare who are severely ill and who need long-term hospital-level treatment," CMS Acting Administrator Kerry Weems said. "The final rule provides incentives to LTCHs to continue to provide compassionate, efficient care to some of Medicare's most severely ill patients, while helping to preserve the solvency of the Medicare Hospital Trust Fund for future generations."

Today, CMS issued a final payment rule for Rate Year 2009 that increases the standard Federal rate for LTCHs by 2.7 percent from the 2008 rate established by Congress in the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act of 2007 (MMSEA). That increase establishes a standard Federal rate for RY 2009 of \$39,114.36 and is applicable to discharges during the 15 month period from July 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009. Aggregate LTCH PPS payments for RY 2009 are estimated at approximately \$4.47 billion, under the final rule, an increase of approximately \$110 million over estimated payments in RY 2008.

LTCHs are generally defined as hospitals with an average Medicare inpatient length of stay greater than 25 days. These hospitals provide extended medical and rehabilitative care for patients with clinically complex conditions, including such services as weaning from ventilators so they can breathe without this assistance, pain management, and rehabilitation.

A beneficiary who is admitted directly to an LTCH pays the same deductible as he or she would pay in an acute care hospital, but if the beneficiary is admitted to the LTCH within sixty days of discharge from another inpatient facility, he or she does not have to pay a second deductible.

Medicare pays LTCHs a single, predetermined amount under the LTCH prospective payment system (PPS) for an inpatient stay based on the patient's diagnosis and the severity of the patient's condition. The LTCH PPS uses a classification system called the Medicare-severity long-term care diagnosis-related groups (MS-LTC-DRG). These are the same MS-DRGs that are used to determine payments for inpatient stays in acute care hospitals, but the payments based on the MS-LTC-DRGs differ from those under the IPPS because the MS-LTC-DRGs reflect the hospital resources required to treat patients during the long-stays that are characteristic for LTCH patients. The payment to the LTCH does not include payment for the services of physicians and non-physician practitioners who bill Medicare separately for the care they provide while the patient is hospitalized. Under certain circumstances, if the hospital's estimated cost of treating a beneficiary is much higher than the adjusted payment amount for the case, Medicare pays an additional amount to the hospital to cover a percentage of the excess costs of providing treatment in that case.

The final rule will be posted on the CMS Web site at: www.cms.hhs.gov/LongTermCareHospitalPPS/LTCHPPSRN/list.asp.