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[Intervention Review]

Music therapy for people with dementia

Annemiek C Vink¹, Manon S Bruinsma², Rob JPM Scholten³

¹Music Therapy Dept., ArtEZ School of Music, Enschede, Netherlands. ²Enschede, Netherlands. ³Dutch Cochrane Centre, Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Contact address: Annemiek C Vink, Music Therapy Dept., ArtEZ School of Music, Van Essengaarde 10, Enschede, 7511 PN, Netherlands. a.c.vink@planet.nl.

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ABSTRACT

Background

Dementia is a clinical syndrome with a number of different causes which is characterised by deterioration in cognitive functions. Research is pursuing a variety of promising findings for the treatment of dementia. Pharmacological interventions are available but have limited ability to treat many of the syndrome's features. Little research has been directed towards non-pharmacological treatments. In this review the evidence for music therapy as a treatment is examined.

Objectives

To assess the effects of music therapy in the treatment of behavioural, social, cognitive and emotional problems of older people with dementia, in relation to the type of music therapy intervention

Search methods

ALOIS, the Specialized Register of the Cochrane Dementia and Cognitive Improvement Group (CDCIG) was searched on 14 April 2010 using the terms: music therapy, music, singing, sing, auditory stimulation. Additional searches were also carried out on 14 April 2010 in the major healthcare databases MEDLINE, EMBASE, PSYCinfo, CINAHL and LILACS, trial registers and grey literature sources to ensure the search was as up-to-date and as comprehensive as possible.

Selection criteria

Randomised controlled trials that reported clinically relevant outcomes associated with music therapy in treatment of behavioural, social, cognitive and emotional problems of older people with dementia.

Data collection and analysis

Two reviewers screened the retrieved studies independently for methodological quality. Data from accepted studies were independently extracted by the reviewers.

Main results

Ten studies were included. The methodological quality of the studies was generally poor and the study results could not be validated or pooled for further analyses.

Authors' conclusions

The methodological quality and the reporting of the included studies were too poor to draw any useful conclusions.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

There is no substantial evidence to support nor discourage the use of music therapy in the care of older people with dementia

The specific focus was to assess whether music therapy can diminish behavioural and cognitive problems or improve social and emotional functioning. Ten studies have been included in this review which state that music therapy is beneficial for treating older people with dementia. However, the methodological quality of these small, short-term studies was generally poor, as was the presentation of results. No useful conclusions can be drawn.