

Book Review by M. Slevin

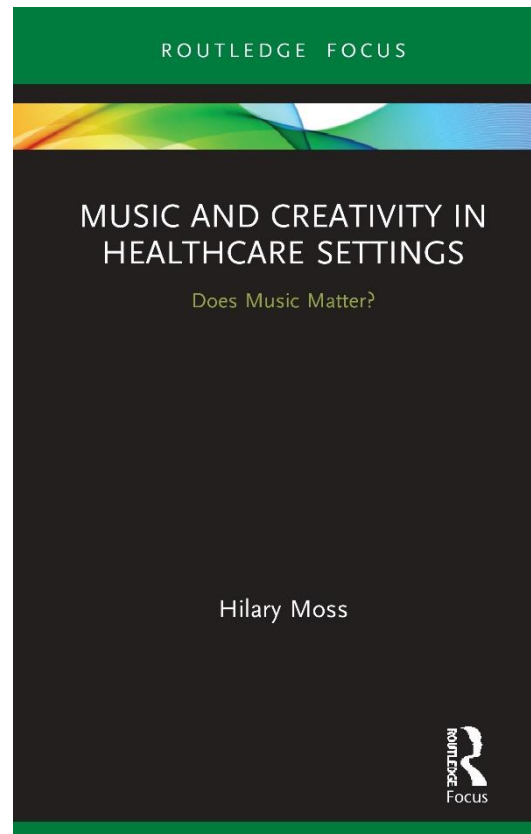
‘Music and Creativity in Healthcare Settings – Does Music Matter?’

By Hilary Moss

The use of music in medical settings has become increasingly prevalent in recent years leading to the necessity to properly evaluate its role in healthcare settings – Hilary Moss does exactly this in her beautifully presented ‘near pocket sized’ book, which is immediately appealing to read. This can be a ‘pick up and read’ book or treated as an in-depth study of the role of music as a therapeutic intervention incorporating the arts in bringing some human feeling into sterile healthcare settings. The book has 5 chapters each addressing a specific theme of good practice. Her listening chapter, a must for every clinician to read. As quoted from Ho and Srivastava 2019* “Sometimes and especially in cases when medicine cannot help, the art of listening is the only tool we have to offer”.

This is Moss’ own story. She taps into her 25 years of experience, detailing her own perspectives and evocative personal stories to highlight the value of music in situations of serious illness and extreme pain.

Each chapter is backed up with a detailed reference section for further reading. A list of online music and interview files is included to supplement each story / theme. This technique allows the reader to absorb Moss’s personal experiences and really feel the powerful impact of music intervention and therapy in the cases presented. Recurring themes that are vital to all hospital based music and health programmes are explored, for example, the role of music as a means of communication when words are not available - the patients who could not talk speaking through their chosen music or songs they wrote, the musical conversation she had with a non-verbal young boy (as result of injury) delighted to be able to express himself through music, the role of music as a simple, but significant, distraction from the pain and distress of illness.



Moss demonstrates well the benefits of how listening to one's favourite music in the acute phase of a stroke makes a marked difference to a range of recovery variables. She notes that evidence is highest for people with dementia and stroke. The rehabilitative effects of 'music – based interventions' in several neurological diseases is now advanced.

Her illustration of the music narrative is powerful. Patients contending with challenging illnesses can begin to regain their identity and creativity to live more meaningfully despite their health difficulties through music. Music therapists have time to spend with patients listening and offering opportunities for self-expression, validation of identity and offering support in an otherwise busy healthcare environment. Moss shows how the power of music can effect change in communication (verbal and non-verbal), quality of life, perception of pain, anxiety and motivation. It can offer 'moments' of freedom for patients from their medicalized environment.

Moss makes a very valid point and balances her argument for music by also realizing through her research and experience that music is not always good for you! Music should not be used for "music's sake". Music does not necessarily make you a happy healthier person". The music chosen should be patient led.

It is critical that any music brought into a hospital setting is provided only to people who want to listen, that they are given a choice of what type of music they want to listen to and can stop listening when they want to. *She is not a fan of Christmas Carols sung badly!*

Moss presents practical 'to do' lists to inspire good practice for those who want to introduce music to improve the hospital atmosphere or doctor's waiting room. She emphasizes high quality music over poor performances and most important of all highlights the value of music therapy and music and health practice as something worth investing in. Her thought-provoking stories will definitely motivate many healthcare clinicians to welcome music therapists as part of their teams. She explores all aspects of music in the health care setting to include patient's families, healthcare staff / surgeons operating (however noise distraction can also be an issue, and this is where there is a fine balance). She emphasizes that there must be a team approach (hospital staff and qualified music therapists working and planning together). The engagement of clinicians is crucial in effecting this positive change.

There is much to reflect on in this book – as healthcare professionals this book alone is a perfect guide to improving overall patient care, while also appealing to musicians, music therapists, and in my view essential reading for anyone working in care and healing.

*Ho, V. and Srivastava, S. (2019) Violins, Medicine and the Art of Listening. *Med Teach*, 1-2, available: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2019.1584277>

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