

Music and lyrics: Songwriting at the end of life

Trudy Hui Hui Chua¹, Tan Ying Peh^{1,2}

1. Assisi Hospice Singapore, 2. Division of Supportive and Palliative Care, National Cancer Centre Singapore

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Background: Music therapy involves the use of music within a bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach¹ to support improvements in one's health, functioning and wellbeing². **Therapeutic songwriting** as a music therapy method encompasses a process of creating, notating and/or recording lyrics and music within a therapeutic relationship to address the client's needs³. In the palliative care context, therapeutic songwriting can provide an avenue for patients to engage in life review, create legacies and send messages to important people in their lives⁴.

Aim: To describe the use and explore the potential therapeutic benefits of songwriting as a music therapy intervention in palliative care through three case studies in an inpatient hospice in Singapore.

Methods: Songwriting was employed as a music therapy intervention for three hospice inpatients. Data was analysed retrospectively from the music therapist's clinical notes in the songwriting process as well as themes that emerged from the patients' song lyrics co-created with the music therapist.

Results: The first two patients experienced co-creation of original songs with the music therapist, with the process reflected in Fig. 1 and 2. Songwriting allowed for them to make sense of their illness journey and experience relationship completion and closure with their loved ones. The third patient experienced songwriting through song parody / lyric substitution, and songwriting allowed her to express her identity and personality through her choice of lyrics and tune. In all case studies, common outcomes from songwriting were **legacy creation**, opportunities for **unique expressions of their personhood**, opportunities to **discuss and process end-of-life matters**, and a **sharing of key messages to intended recipients**. Patients reported positive emotions and a sense of closure and relief upon completing their songs.

Fig. 1: Songwriting process for patient 1's original song creation.

Music therapist's prompts	Patient's responses to 3 rd prompt	Extract of original song lyrics
Tell me about your father. Tell me about your relationship with your father. What would you like to say to him?	I miss you, I love you, my tatay. Thank you for being with me all these years. It seems impossible for us to meet again, even though we want to.	Tatay, I miss you. Tatay, I love you Pagmamahal mo'y lalagi sa puso ko (your love will always be in my heart)
	Maybe it's God's plan for us to meet in heaven.	Tatay, I miss you. Tatay, I love you Lahat kami nagmamahal ng tapat sayo (all of us, your children, we love you)
	Will you still call me your bunso when we meet in heaven?	

Fig. 2: Songwriting process for patient 2's original song creation.

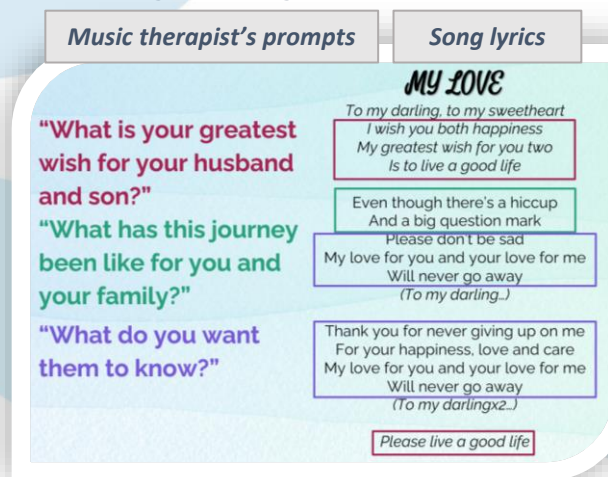
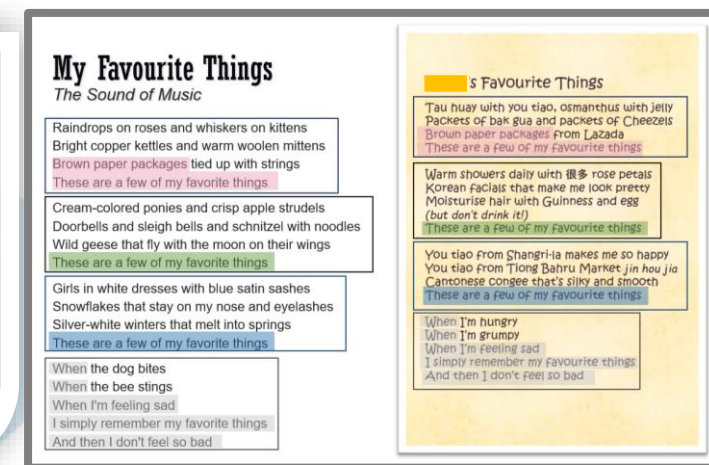


Fig. 3: Lyric substitution / song parody songwriting example for patient 3.



Conclusions: The use of songwriting in palliative care can be a means for patients to explore and achieve relationship closure, review their life and illness journeys, uniquely express themselves, and create a legacy.

These can be beneficial for patients' psychosocial and emotional wellbeing as they approach the end of life.

References:

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