

The Melodies of Healing

I was visiting Kauai, that magical Pacific island, and some friends took me to their favorite Indian restaurant in Kapaa town. There, I chanced to meet my old friend, Tim Lee, an ophthalmologist and an accomplished pianist. During our brief conversation, he told me about work he's been doing with other physician-musicians on Oahu, particularly, Dr. Jorge Camara.

Camara organizes concerts to raise money for Aloha Medical Missions¹ and did a study on piano music in the OR prior to ophthalmic surgery.² He learned that listening to live classical piano music has a beneficial effect on mean arterial blood pressure, heart rate, and respiratory rate of patients undergoing ophthalmic surgery. This article is available full text from PubMed Central². (One suspects that the music has a similar effect on the surgeon playing it. While this can be a confounding variable, it is not that important. The music is salutary to many.)

Fast forward a few days. I am at my dentist's office for some "work" and not without anticipatory anxiety. Muzak is being blared in from a local pop station. The song being played is raucous and features, I kid you not, the word "pain." I mention this to the dental assistant who thinks it's funny and ironic.

Dental surgery is one of the things many people dread. The thought enters my mind. What effect would Camara's approach have on patients in the dental chair? Live music in the dentist's office! Would different genres of music work better for different people? Some might do better with classical, some with Hawaiian music, perhaps teenagers with (even!) rap! Camara's ophthalmic patients average age was, after all, 65. (A PubMed search reveals a recent article about music during dental extraction.³)

One can extrapolate this approach to other medical situations and more broadly to many other venues. (How about court?) Would this approach ameliorate "white coat hypertension?" How much does it matter if the music is live? Some years ago, I was in Cuba, and noticed that almost every restaurant or bar I visited had a live trio playing. I don't remember the food, but the music set a wonderful tone for the evenings. Cuba, like Hawaii, is another magical place.

This is not a totally new area. There have been a number of studies on the beneficial effects of music on health and healing. It's fascinating to contemplate the favorable effects of a simple non-toxic ancillary approach to anxiety and pain; to healing and caring. The effects may be far-reaching.

Thank you Tim Lee and Jorge Camara.

References:

1. <http://www.alohamedicalmission.org/>
2. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2491669/?tool=pubmed>
3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20708320>

[Musical Intervention Reduces Patients' Anxiety in Surgical Extraction of an Impacted Mandibular Third Molar.](#) Kyoung Kim Y, Kim SM, Myoung H.