

# Finding Solace in Unusual Places

Mary Tenney, BSN, RN, CCRN-K, Nurse Manager, NICU and Pediatrics

Many understand the ability of the nursing profession to blend art with science, but I recently learned of another vocation doing the same thing in a unique way. While at the Volunteer Recognition Lunch back in April 2016, I was mesmerized by a young woman sitting high in the rafters of the Red Lion Inn in Cohasset, playing the most elegant of instruments, the harp. I remember thinking I should have asked if she played at private events but left hurriedly to return to work and forgot all about it. Little did I know that 2 years later, I would run in to her again but in a professional capacity. Meet Nicole Anderson, MS, CCM, a Certified Clinical Musician trained in harp and piano.

Music touches all of us in very distinct ways, but therapeutic music at the bedside in a clinical setting is a recognized evidence-based therapeutic intervention behaving much differently from playing the Top 40 on our radios. The goals of music therapy interventions are to promote wellness, manage stress, and alleviate pain, to name a few. I recently sat with Nicole, anxious to learn about her evolution towards becoming a Certified Clinical Musician.

For many of the 17 years Nicole has been playing the harp, she has shared her love of music with those living in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities and it was 2 years ago she extended her music to the bedside when she began playing at the Pat Roche Hospice House in Hingham. It was there she found her music could be a part of both holistic and traditional medicine. She talks about how playing the harp for those at the end of life is much like gentle touch; “a massage with music” as she referred it to. Nicole believes the sense of hearing is keen during birth and at death; and when the subtle consciousness leaves the body, the mind does not cease and therefore, her music acts much like holding hands until the connection between mind and body has ended. Even for those at the end of life but not nearing death, therapeutic music can guide to a better state of mind in the moment, a spiritual practice Nicole says most embrace.

After playing at the Volunteer Lunch back in the Spring of 2016, Nicole asked Volunteer Services Director Diane Downs if there were any internship opportunities at South Shore Hospital which would allow her to fulfill her requirements while attending her 2-yearlong certification program. With Diane Downs and Dean Haspala, Nurse Manager of Emerson 5, I met Nicole during one of those meetings to facilitate these opportunities and immediately began to think of all the possibilities. The patient population on Emerson 5 was Nicole’s genre, but I knew of research supporting

music therapy in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and Pediatric populations as well. In February 2017, the journal *Advances in Neonatal Care* published a study supporting the effects of relaxing music and how it can improve physiological cardiac and respiratory variables in premature infants. In other words, music of this nature stabilizes the respiratory rate which in turn, lowers the heart rate while oxygen levels remain uncompromised or improve. Nicole not only supports this premise but states she has seen it in her practice. She says there is a difference between recorded and live music, with the latter providing vibrations the patient can feel, and the ability to cater to the patient's needs. For an example, Nicole chooses pieces to play with a tempo matching the patient's heart rate and then slows the tempo down accordingly. (continued on page 17)

Nicole recently played for one of our NICU patients and what I observed after the first few minutes was striking. The heart rate of the premature infant she sat next to decreased from an upper normal of 160 BPM to an impressive 145 BPM. The inherent hub bub of staff suddenly came to a halt, and I noticed there was also something else missing. The silence of alarms from other patients was deafening. I remember Nicole had mentioned the sense of heightened hearing at birth is receptive to this type of music, and perhaps their tiny bodies that day did feel the vibrations she was talking about.

Nicole will be ending her internship here at South Shore Hospital in June and she tells me this therapeutic intervention has yet to be recognized by insurance companies for reimbursement consideration. She relies on grant funding if she is to play in healthcare facilities in this manner, so I appreciate even more, the fact we were able to experience this, even if for only a brief time. She has played for our patients on Pediatrics, NICU, Special Care Nursery, Emerson 5, and CCU, and I am certain many have reaped the benefits of her love for music, merged with her desire to help those in need.



Nicole Anderson, playing at the bedside of a premature infant in the NICU at South Shore Hospital