

EDITORIAL

The Impact of Recreational Music-making for Long-Term Care Workers

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The featured article in this issue, *Recreational Music-Making: A Cost-Effective Group Interdisciplinary Strategy for Reducing Burnout and Improving Mood States in Long-Term Care Workers—Insights and Potential Economic Impact*,¹ represents an outstanding research contribution. This paper provides for a new, innovative approach outside the realm of direct patient impact. Bittman and his research team present a compelling comprehensive rationale for directly addressing and developing effective programs to meet the needs of the often-overlooked healthcare worker.

This study not only introduces recreational music-making as an effective interdisciplinary group mind-body wellness strategy, but also serves to document impressive, statistically-significant improvements in burnout and mood parameters in a stressed healthcare workforce serving one of society's most challenged areas—long-term care.

The authors explore the multidimensional impact of a unique recreational music-making program in the context of diminishing long-term care employee turnover rates that are currently estimated at over 60% per year in the US. The process of reducing turnover and thereby fostering enhanced continuity of care impacts not only healthcare workers, but also their families, long-term care centers, and ultimately residents and their loved ones alike.

In addition, Bittman and colleagues present a post hoc economic-impact analysis performed by an independent healthcare financial consulting firm. A potential savings of \$89,100 based upon reduced employee turnover was projected for each typical 100-bed long-term care facility that uses this innovative music strategy.

Based upon these results and the economic impact projections, this editor subsequently contacted the long-term care center where this study was performed for additional information. During a telephone interview, Donald Clawson, president of Wesbury United Methodist Retirement Community in Meadville, Pa, reported that a marked behavioral shift in greater tolerance and team-building had indeed occurred in his workforce since the inception of this intervention. In addition, he noted a significant improvement in employee morale, as well as a dramatic and concomitant reduction of employee complaints during this period. Clawson also referred to data recently compiled by the center's human resources department, which concluded that a substantial reduction in the employee turnover rate had occurred, comparing 2002 (the year of the study) with the

baseline year 2001 prior to initiating the project. This accounts for 49 more employees retained in 2002, compared with 2001, further attributing improvement primarily to the recreational music-making program. Of particular importance is the fact that all Wesbury personnel did not participate in this project. It should also be noted that while improved retention cannot be ascribed entirely to this intervention, based upon a wide variety of variables, these "real world" findings exceed the authors' conservative retention projections of 11 additional employees per 100 beds per year.

While scientific studies are only beginning to document the psychosocial impact of active music-making strategies, this pioneering research clearly establishes a key foundational building block for ongoing research that justifies the elucidation of biological correlates of recreational music-making interventions in future research investigations.

Given the critical financial crisis facing our fragile long-term care industry nationwide, coupled with the impending challenges of providing quality care for a rapidly aging society in industrialized nations throughout the world, these positive findings deserve extensive consideration and justify an expansion of multi-center testing.

Ultimately it does not take a stretch of the imagination to realize that the remarkable prevalence of burnout, mood disorders, and extraordinary employee turnover rates do not just threaten the future viability of long-term care. The resultant impact on other sectors of the workforce in our society cannot be ignored. Further research is recommended to apply this beneficial cost-saving recreational music-making strategy to hospitals, as well as to industries and businesses facing overwhelming stress-related challenges in today's highly competitive society. A new page has been turned in the application of mind-body medicine.

Reference

1. Bittman B, Bruhn KT, Stevens C, Westengard J, Umbach PO. Recreational music-making: a cost-effective group interdisciplinary strategy for reducing burnout and improving mood states in long-term care workers—insights and potential economic impact. *Adv Mind Body Med.* 2003 19:3/4:4-15.

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