Can music therapy help the elderly with depression?

Background
Depression in elderly people is an ongoing concern, contributing to comorbidities and increasing deaths from suicide. Alternative treatments for the elderly are needed due to risks from polypharmacy and unwanted side effects. Therefore, we considered music therapy and its evidence base as a possible management modality.

Aim
This study evaluates how music therapy can treat depression in the elderly population, aiming to further investigate the effects that music can have on health. An analysis of over 20 research papers was carried out, looking into a range of topics varying from the monoamine hypothesis of depression to how music can affect multiple comorbidities.

Method
A search using accredited platforms, such as PubMed and OVID, was carried out into recent and robust research in this area, to provide a systematic review of the literature.

Results
The key papers showed that music was found to have a positive effect on mental aspects of health, as described by a number of psychological theories. Current pharmacological treatments for depression were often not compatible with elderly patients due to unwanted side effects and potentially dangerous results from polypharmacy; therefore, music therapy offered a safer alternative. The results also showed that music therapy can be more favourable than psychological therapy, such as CBT, due to its lower energy and concentration requirements.

Conclusion
Depression in the elderly is a serious illness that can lead to reduced quality of life and poor health status. Non-pharmacological treatments need to be identified and music therapy can be an accessible way of doing this, with numerous benefits demonstrated.

Anjali Vaidyanathan, University of Manchester
Ellena Carroll, University of Manchester

Email: ellena.carroll@student.manchester.ac.uk