

ÉTABLISSEMENT DE SUITE  
PSYCHIATRIQUE

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English Translation

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To : Dr. Alain Amouyal  
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Dear Sir,

Please forgive me for the delay, but it was very difficult for me to write this letter and to generalize my personal observations.

I am a registered nurse at RELAXAZUR, a psychiatric “step-down” clinic housing thirty-seven patients. The main pathology at this facility has to do with neurotic-depressive states. We use relaxation and music therapy to allow the patients access to their bodies and to forgotten, often traumatic, childhood memories, primary causes of their depression.

Since the beginning of July 2002, I took charge of the music therapy sessions; there were three sessions per week with 12 patients maximum - the sessions were open to all.

Each session has two parts: thirty minutes listening to a C.D. (all chosen from the “Dynamic Evolutionary Impulsion” collection and “Catharsis”), and then thirty minutes to an hour (depending on the number of participants) spent talking about feelings and impressions.

The new patients are often surprised; they expect a relaxing music but find out that it is moving more than anything, since it comes into resonance with each person's issues.

This music evokes images mixed with emotions. It allows the patient to put words to their mental suffering. For example, while listening to a CD with a bell tolling, most of the participants associated images of loved-one's funerals, with emotions ranging from despair to grief to infinite sadness to acceptance and inner peace. In this way, we understand the journey through the psycho-therapeutic work with grief.

The music, through it's serious tones, enters deeply into us and frees up forgotten memories. When the memories are painful, I invite the patients to address them with the house psychologist.

Through this listening, the patients make correlations between the music and their experiences. For example, as one of the melodies is repeated, some people feel uncomfortable, annoyed, a feeling of unpleasant routine or the repetition of negative events in their life; others feel reassured, secure and the repetition brings a feeling of familiarity and predictability.

This simple example allows us to bring our own ways of being up to date.

To this music, many people visualize some part of their life as a metaphor, seen as an overview of their life. They recall the main events of their life that led them to depression.

In general, the first sessions are very nerve-racking because they bring up their inner anguish or memories that are difficult to experience. Not infrequently, they fall asleep in order to flee this painful information (a self-defense mechanism). Then, feeling themselves in a safe place, they progressively abandon their defenses and let their emotions out. The ability to let out these repressed emotions is a liberation in itself.

Many of the patients are constantly controlling their bodies and it is difficult for them to let go. This music carries them away, gives them a release, relaxation, access to their deepest desires and their subconscious. Some people confess horrible memories (mistreatment, rape, incest, etc...) that they had pushed away and which they no longer remembered.

In general, the content of the visualizations points to each individual's issues, that is to say, the priorities to address at the present moment.

I remember a patient who was depressive after her husband left her. She understood intellectually that he no longer loved her, that he wanted to begin a new life with another woman. But, emotionally, this was unacceptable, intolerable. With the help of a psychiatrist, who asked her the crucial question: "Why did you choose this man?" and through the links that appeared in music therapy between the physical resemblance of her husband and her brother (who had died at a young age and whose death she had never really mourned), she understood: in separating from her husband, she was losing her brother for a second time. Working on the grief around her young brother's death allowed her to accept the divorce and to return to her life with enthusiasm.

As you can see, music therapy facilitates a true psychotherapeutic work. I hope that I was able to help you with these few observations, even though music therapy goes above and beyond what I have recorded here. I would be happy to oblige with more detailed accounts.

Please accept my sincerest regards.

Mme Tournon,  
Relaxazur Clinic