

healing *in time*



Donors support music therapy for pediatric patients

A toddler bangs on a drum. A teenager sings a Top 40 tune with new lyrics she's written to express something personal. A shy young boy is drawn out and dances while his new friend plays the guitar. In a place where tears and fears are all too common, the music therapy program at the UMass Memorial Children's Medical Center (CMC) brings smiles and harmony to many patients.

It is a program made possible only by philanthropy. This year, music therapy will continue to be a part of the care delivered at the medical center because of leadership gifts made by Carol and Michael Sleeper of Worcester and another local couple who wish to remain anonymous.

Above: Trish Jonason conducts a music therapy session with Audri, a pediatric patient.



"We have a special spot in our hearts for pediatrics," Michael said. "Carol and I both feel blessed that we have three healthy children, but we know people who have not been as fortunate. Seeing what those families have gone through inspired us to do what we could to help children heal. That's been our focus with this annual donation."

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Through their family-owned business, Imperial Distributors, the Sleepers have partnered with the CMC for 13 years, making annual donations to support a range of services and programs. In early 2015, the Sleepers and an anonymous donor couple responded to a need for the music therapy program, which was first launched in 2013 because of the generosity of another anonymous donor couple.

“We are so thankful for the Sleepers and the other families who have made it possible for us to have this therapy program,” said Melissa Luman, manager of the CMC’s Child Life Program. “Music is an important part of what we can offer children who find themselves hospitalized.”

The program is delivered by Trish Jonason, a board certified music therapist. Currently, she’s in the CMC twice a week and can see four to five patients each day, one-on-one, based on a referral from the patient’s nurse or physician.

“These children have no control over what’s happening to them, and that makes them feel scared and powerless,” Jonason said. “So my first step, always, is to ask each child what music they like and how they want to work together. I become an instrument for them. They are in control, and that makes all the difference.”

Jonason may play songs requested, or together she and the patient may listen to recorded music. Patients may sing along, or keep time with rhythm instruments like drums, maracas or tambourines.

If she sees a patient for multiple sessions, they may write music or lyrics together. Often, Jonason will give willing patients guitar lessons.

“I get to spend 45 minutes with each child—a monumental amount of time in the clinical setting,” she said.

According to Luman, the positive effects of music therapy are multifaceted. It can help relieve stress and can foster cathartic emotional expression. The muscular control needed to play simple instruments is a form of physical therapy for some children. Furthermore, said Jonason, when music brings out otherwise withdrawn patients, they often communicate better with the entire care team and that can lead to better outcomes.

For the Sleepers, supporting the music therapy program was an easy choice. “It’s another example of the extraordinary range of care provided to the community by the Children’s Medical Center.

“When I was a kid growing up in Worcester, this was still an industrial city,” Michael said. “Worcester is now an international leader in biomedical research, medical education and clinical care. The impact that this medical school and hospital system have had on our community has been tremendous. Carol and I feel privileged to be able to support the UMass Memorial Children’s Medical Center.” ♦

For more information about the Child Life Program at the UMass Memorial Children’s Medical Center, visit http://bit.ly/umassmemorial_child_life.

