

BEDSIDE HARP™ Launches A Groundbreaking Research Project

On April 4, 2005, Bedside Harp™ and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Rahway, in Rahway, New Jersey will join together to launch a harp therapy research project that we hope will help pave the way for the hospitals all over the world to give serious consideration to adding fulltime harp therapists to their staffs.

A little over a year ago, a cover story in *Newsweek* featured a research study which attempted to evaluate the use of prayer on the health of patients undergoing heart catheterization or angioplasty.ⁱ Preliminary results indicated no improvement in patients being prayed for over other groups; however, one of the groups—a so-called “turbocharged” group, which received both prayers and [a] music program, had death rates 30 percent lower than any of the other patients.”

Intrigued by this finding, I approached each of our host hospitals and proposed that we at Bedside Harp™ collaborate with them to explore the connection between music and prayer. Focusing on patients entering the hospital with the primary diagnosis of either Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) or pneumonia, our project will study the effects of live harp therapy, by itself and in conjunction with remote intercessory prayer, on patients’ recovery time as expressed in their lengths-of-stay at the Hospital.

Last December I had the privilege of speaking about our proposed project with Dr. Herbert Benson, M.D. founding President of the Mind/Body Medical Institute and the Mind/Body Medical Institute Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School. Dr. Benson, a widely recognized pioneer in mind/body medicine, has enjoyed an enormously successful career, having brought the concept of spirituality into healing over thirty years ago. Back then, even though it was not at all in vogue for people of science to

think, let alone write about such things, Dr. Benson hypothesized that by interrupting the pattern of normal thought (what he calls, 'the Relaxation Response,' in a book by the same name) for a short period of time every day, healing will be promoted.ⁱⁱ When I described our impending project to him, he smiled and offered me words I took to heart. "You will," he predicted, "be able to get measurable results. Your music will, indeed, elicit the Relaxation Response."

Hospital research protocols require that a number of steps be taken before that hospital is able to agree to participate in any project involving live human subjects, not the least of which is to receive approval from that hospital's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviews the project, puts it through its own tests and measures, comes back to the co-investigators to ask for clarification, revision, additional requirements, etc. and even after all of that, has the power to reject the proposal for a host of reasons.

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Rahway is a community hospital and as such, had never before participated in a research project. Even though they did not have their own IRB in place when I brought our proposal to them, their newly formed Research Committee, headed by Janet Coughlin, R.N., M.S.N. so appreciated the potential of the study, they decided to proceed with it by using as their governing body, the IRB of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), that state's university of health sciences and the largest institution of its kind in the nation.

Entitled, "To Measure the Effects of Live Harp Therapy and/or Remote Intercessory Prayer on Hospitalized Patients' Length of Stay," the study will be conducted by three co-investigators: Kara Kaldawi, RN, MSN, APN-C, BC, Geriatric Clinical Nurse Specialist, RWJUH Rahway, Reverend Dr. William C. Weaver,

Pastoral Care Liaison, RWJUH Rahway, and me, Edie Elkan, B.A., HCMHT, Founding Director of Bedside Harp™. The three of us met regularly over the course of many months, refining our focus and goals, challenging each other with questions and ‘what if’ scenarios as we gained greater insight into and understanding of the complex issues likely to present themselves in our day to day operations. Each of us also was required to meet certain educational and professional requirements and to complete a number of coursework pre-requisites as well. Finally, sixteen months after we had first submitted our proposal to the hospital, we received official word from the hospital that UMDNJ’s IRB had approved our project—our study could now begin!!

We at Bedside Harp™ welcome this opportunity to study, within the structure of a highly scientific environment and under the auspices of a most prestigious, world-class medical university, the effects of live harp therapy in the hospital setting. Adding yet more layers to this, a number of our participating interns intend to use their experience with this for their practicum projects, and I plan to use this as my capstone project for the Master of Arts degree I am presently pursuing.

The greatest challenge to us at Bedside Harp™, we suspect, will lie in the area of scheduling. As the study is planned, two of the three groups of patient participants will receive 10-20 minute sessions of live harp therapy each day of their hospitalizations, meaning that we will need to provide coverage at the hospital seven days a week. A good number of our certification program interns presently working their internships at all four of our host hospitals have expressed their desire to play a part in this study, causing us to feel confident that we’ll be able to meet that challenge.

Involving nearly 300 patients, the initial phase of the project is slated to take place over the period of two years. Because we have proposed this project to two other of our host hospitals, we anticipate the possibility of one or both of them participating as well, which could conceivably bring the total number of participants to nearly 1,000!

We are, indeed, most grateful to be involved in this exciting research and further, to be able to afford our certification student interns the opportunity of playing an essential role in what we believe will be a truly groundbreaking study in our field.

ⁱ Kalb, Claudia. 2003. "Faith and healing," *Newseek*. 17 November.

ⁱⁱ Read Dr. Benson's fuller explication of this theory at <http://www.mbmi.org/pages/bio2.asp>