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Source: The Institute for Therapy through the Arts.

Music therapy can help some children regulate emotion and communicate their needs more effectively, said Jeffrey Wolfe, neurologic music therapist at the Institute for Therapy through the Arts.

Why are kids with neurologic problems hospitalized all the time?

by **ERIN SHEA**
Jan 18, 2012

One out of every three dollars spent in inpatient care in children's hospitals goes for children with neurological impairments, disorders relating to the central nervous system, brain and spinal cord.

Children with neurological impairments, such as epilepsy and cerebral palsy, tend to account for a significant amount of inpatient resources at hospitals in the U.S., according to a study in the current medical section of the Public Library of Science.

"They are hospitalized a lot more and stay longer than kids" without neurological impairments, said Jay Berry, lead researcher and assistant professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

Children with brain and nervous system disorders are living longer than they have in the past. These children are more likely to have other medical problems since the brain controls bodily functions, such as breathing and movement, Berry said.

Researchers looked at data recorded over 10 years for hospitalized infants and adolescents. They evaluated the number of hospitalizations, total number of days spent in the hospital and total charges for admissions associated with neurological impairment.

"I've seen more of the kids who are hospitalized have neurological impairments," said Rishi Agrawal, pediatric hospitalist at La Rabida Children's Hospital in Chicago, who wasn't involved with the study. "Neurological impairment patients tend to have high repeat hospital visits."

During the 2009 swine flu pandemic, children who were most severely affected were those with neurological impairments, he said.

Most of the time when these children are admitted to the hospital, it's for symptoms not associated with neurological issues. So other doctors, such as cardiologists and general pediatricians, treat them. These doctors may be inexperienced in working with children with neurological disorders, Berry said.

"Families feel that these providers need to be educated on how to deal with these kids," he said that a shift in pediatric residents'

training might occur in the next 10 years to incorporate this topic. "We need to do a great job training future pediatricians how to understand and assess these children."

Agrawal has taught a few continuing education courses about understanding neurological disorders, but he said there needs to be more training on this in residency and medical education.

Children with neurological disorders may have a hard time communicating their pain and distress to doctors who aren't familiar with these disorders. Berry said physicians need to have a close relationship with these children, or experience working with them, to know when they're not okay.

Alternative therapies, such as music therapy, may help children with neurological disorders communicate with others.

The music can help some children "regulate emotion and communicate their own needs effectively," said Jeffrey Wolfe, neurologic music therapist at the Institute for Therapy through the Arts in Chicago. He said that some children find music and instruments to be a communication tool, such as "tap once on this drum for yes and two for no."

Parents tell Berry that their children with neurological disorders find music stimulating.

"When kids are excited and happy, their posture improves, they breathe deeply and their brains are engaged," Berry said. "This may prevent hospitalization in the future."

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