

## HEALTH

# The healing power of music

## *Concord Hospital program brings musicians to patients' bedside*

BY CINDY KIBBE

A private music concert with a soloist sounds very nice, but when that concert is held amid IV lines and heart monitors, it can take on a life-affirming quality. And that's why such instrumental serenades are part of a new program offered by Concord Hospital.

While Concord Hospital has been integrating music and healing for over six years, having certified specialists play in the intensive care unit at the patient's bedside signals a new phase in the program, which recently received a \$2,400 grant from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts.

"The role of music in healing and wellness has been known for a long time," said Alice Kinsler, manager of the hospital's therapeutic arts and activity services. "That role, however, has kind of gotten lost in our culture, but we're rediscovering it."

She cited many studies that show music not only gives pleasure and can serve as a diversion for the anxious or those in pain, some forms of music also can lower blood pressure, lower the heart rate, reduce muscular tension and decrease respirations.

Working in coordination with hospital staff, Kinsler began piloting the ICU bedside music program in May, and has received rave reviews.

"Not only did the patients enjoy it, but it benefited the staff and the families as well," she said. "That was a bit of a surprise to us."

The three musicians — harpist Anne Bewley of Center Sandwich, pianist Emily Mills of Spofford, and guitarist

Beverly Rush of Nashua — are all Certified Music Practitioners having completed special training from Music for Healing and Transition Program Inc. to perform in a clinical setting comforting the ill and the dying.

"Studies have shown that even patients that cannot communicate or who are in a coma still receive healing benefits from music," said Kinsler, who is also a registered art therapist.

### 'Overwhelmingly positive'

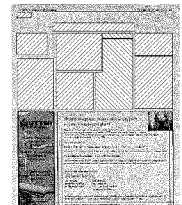
The musicians work collaboratively with nurses and other hospital staff to identify those who might benefit from the music.

If the patient and the families are interested, the musician sets up a time best suited for the patient within his or her treatment plan and plays or sings gentle, soothing music at the bedside.

Kinsler said some patients require less pain medication during and even up to an hour after a music session or other creative activity, such as drawing a greeting card or playing a round of bingo viewed from the hospital's closed-circuit television system.

The grant money helps to pay for the musicians' time as well as for workshops and educational sessions for staff, physicians and volunteers to learn more about music's role in healing and wellness.

The use of music in healing is not new to the 295-bed Concord Hospital. A number of talented amateur musicians volunteer their time and talent and play for patients in the hospital's out-



patient setting of the Payson Center for Cancer Care, hospital lobby and other patient settings.

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive," said Kinsler.

In fact, executive management has approved Kinsler's budget for bedside music programs for the coming fiscal year.

Kinsler uses many different techniques — from having patients choose a special art print to hang in their room during their stay to playing games to petting a gentle dog or cat during a pet therapy session — to help patients adapt to the difficult position of being in the hospital and possibly facing a disheartening prognosis.

"My passion is the role of self-expression and creativity in healing," she said. "Whatever is available to help patients feel more like themselves, to feel calmer, music is one way to do that."

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Guitarist Beverly Rush plays for a patient as part of Concord Hospital's bedside music program.