

Music Therapist



Job Description

Music therapists use music within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals of all ages, improving quality of life for persons who are well and meeting the needs of children and adults with disabilities or illnesses. After assessing the strengths and needs of each client, qualified music therapists provide the indicated treatment, including creating, singing, moving to, and/or listening to music. Music therapists structure the use of both instrumental and vocal music strategies to facilitate changes that are nonmusical in nature. Music therapists provide services for adults and children with psychiatric disorders, mental retardation and developmental disabilities, speech and hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and neurological impairments, among others. Music therapy interventions can be designed to

- Promote wellness
- Manage stress
- Alleviate pain
- Express feelings
- Enhance memory
- Improve communication
- Promote physical rehabilitation
- Provide unique opportunities for interaction

Depending upon the needs of the clients involved, music therapy sessions are offered on an individual or group basis. Music therapists are usually members of an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals who work collaboratively to help clients achieve treatment goals and objectives.

Personal Qualifications

Music therapists should have a genuine interest in people and a desire to help others empower themselves. The essence of music therapy practice involves establishing caring and professional relationships with people of all ages and abilities. Empathy, patience, creativity, imagination, openness to new ideas, and an understanding of oneself are also important attributes. Because music therapists are musicians as well as therapists, a background in and love of music are also essential. Individuals considering a career in music therapy are advised to gain experience through volunteer opportunities or summer work in nursing homes, camps for children with disabilities, and other settings that serve the needs of people with disabilities.



Employment Characteristics

Music therapists are employed in many different settings, including general and psychiatric hospitals, mental health agencies, physical rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, public and private schools, substance abuse programs, forensic facilities, hospice programs, and day care facilities. Full-time therapists typically work a standard 40-hour workweek. Some therapists prefer part-time work and choose to develop contracts with specific agencies, providing music therapy services for an hourly fee. In addition, a growing number of clinicians are choosing to start private practices in music therapy to benefit from opportunities provided through self-employment.



Salary, Future Outlook

According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), the overall average salary for full-time music therapists was \$38,816 in 2001. Individual salaries vary by population served, work setting, geographic location, years of experience, and level of graduate education completed. The income range reported in 2001 included salaries up to \$100,000.

As an increasing number of consumers seek noninvasive, alternative, and complementary therapies as treatment options, the need for music therapists continues to rise. An increased need for music therapists in early intervention programs, special education settings, geriatric facilities, and community-based services offers a variety of employment options. The next 10 years hold positive opportunities for the music therapy profession.



Educational Programs

Length. Undergraduate students in music therapy undertake a 4-year baccalaureate program of 127 semester hours. Successful completion of a 1,040-hour supervised clinical internship is also required. The master's degree in music therapy requires at least 30 semester hours for completion.

Prerequisites. For entry into undergraduate programs, a high school degree is required, along with demonstration of musicianship. Candidates for the master's degree must hold a baccalaureate degree or equivalent in music therapy (see "Certification," below) or be working concurrently toward fulfilling degree equivalency requirements.

Curriculum. The curriculum is designed to impart entry-level competencies in three main areas: musical foundations, clinical foundations, and music therapy foundations and principles, as specified in the AMTA Professional Competencies. The core curriculum for the baccalaureate degree includes coursework in music therapy; psychology; music; biological, social, and behavioral sciences; disabling conditions; and general studies. This curriculum is followed by a 6-month clinical internship in an approved mental health, special education, or health care facility, where students learn to assess clients' needs, develop and implement treatment plans, and evaluate and document clinical changes.

Graduate programs examine, with greater breadth and depth, issues relevant to the clinical, professional, and academic preparation of music therapists, usually in combination with established methods of research inquiry.



Certification

Each student who has completed academic and clinical training at the baccalaureate level is eligible to sit for the examination administered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists, leading to the credential Music Therapist-Board Certified (MT-BC), which is necessary for professional practice. Individuals who have an earned baccalaureate degree in music may elect to complete the degree equivalency program in music therapy offered by most AMTA-approved universities. Under this program, the student completes only the coursework required for Board certification without necessarily earning a second baccalaureate degree.



Inquiries

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Certification
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Program Accreditation
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