

Music Therapist



Career 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 develop a treatment plan with goals and objectives and then provide the indicated treatment. Music therapists structure the use of both instrumental and vocal music strategies to facilitate changes that are non-musical in nature. They may improvise or compose music with clients, accompany and conduct group music experiences, provide instrument instruction, direct music and movement activities, or structure music listening opportunities. Music therapists provide services for children and adults with psychiatric disorders, 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, enhance memory, improve communication, and 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 address clients' treatment needs.

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, tact, a sense of humor, imagination, creativity, and an understanding of oneself are important characteristics for professionals in this field. People thinking about music therapy as a career must be accomplished musicians. They must be versatile and able to adjust to changing circumstances. Music therapists must express themselves well in speech and in writing. In addition, they must be able to work well with other health care providers.



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. Typically, full-time therapists 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 or contractual 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

According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), the overall average salary for full-time music therapists was \$46,417 in 2007. Individual salaries can vary by population served, work setting, geographic location, years of experience, and level of graduate education completed. The

income range reported in 2007 included salaries up to \$145,000. For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Future Outlook

As an increasing number of consumers seek noninvasive, alternative and complementary therapies as treatment options, the need for music therapists continues to rise. The profession is currently experiencing an increase in requests for music therapy services with individuals diagnosed with autism as well as in early intervention programs and special education settings, in addition to an increased need for music therapy services with individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease in skilled facilities and community-based treatment programs. Other employment areas demonstrating growth include mental health settings, medical facilities, and self-employment/private practice opportunities.



Educational Programs

Length. Those who wish to become music therapists must earn a bachelor's degree or higher in music therapy from one of over 70 AMTA-approved colleges and universities. Entry-level study requires academic coursework and 1,200 hours of clinical training, including a supervised internship.

Prerequisites. For entry into undergraduate programs, a high school diploma is required, along with demonstration of musicianship. Candidates for the masters 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. Graduate programs in music therapy 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

At the completion of academic and clinical training, students are eligible to take the national examination administered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT), an independent, non-profit certifying agency fully accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. After successful completion of the CBMT examination, graduates are issued the credential necessary for professional practice, Music Therapist-Board Certified (MT-BC). To demonstrate continued competence and to maintain this credential, music therapists are required to complete 100 hours of continuing music therapy education, or to retake and pass the CBMT examination within every 5-year recertification cycle.



Inquiries

Education and Careers

American Music Therapy Association (AMTA)
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Certification

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Program Accreditation

National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)
11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21
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703 437-0700
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