

The Effect of a Mood Sequence Formula™ on PTSD

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Abstract

The debilitating effects of PTSD on veterans undermines desire for positive life connections. One female army veteran participated in a Music 4 Life® Music Medicine Protocol called a Mood Sequence Formula™ with the desire to be motivated, happy and balanced, experience less stress, worry and depression, and feel “complete” after four years of medical disability and experiencing social phobias. After two weeks of daily listening, she had achieved these goals. After six weeks she reported discontinuing anti-anxiety, depression and pain medications with doctor approval. Posttests reported significant shifts in emotional states with reduced unsettledness, and increased soothed and energized moods.

Client Background and Goals

L is a 36 year old Army veteran presenting with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, trauma/PTSD, and issues associated with Graves Disease, Fibromyalgia, holes in her left ear drum causing sound sensitivity, and cervical disc deterioration. She also identified past episodes of abuse, the loss of several friends to tragedy, and being stationed as an operating room/trauma tech at Fort Hood during the shootings in November 2009. In her initial assessment, L stated that she felt frustrated, depressed, anxious, anger stress, tired, ill, sad, and extreme unbalance. She identified difficulty relaxing and social phobias as well. At the time of initial assessment, L was taking synthroid, propranolol, and Vitamin D.

During the assessment L shared that she had disturbing dreams where bodies would rise up to kill her. Music utilizing cellos, Cyndi Lauper, or those similar to 80's “hair bands” were identified as triggering anger due to associations with past abuse. She had a past history of the death of a friend during a kayaking accident and another in Iraq.

L listed the following goals or desires she wished to accomplish during her treatment:

- Feel motivated, happy, and balanced
- Relieve stress, worry, and depression
- Feel complete and more outgoing, more exercise with a better attitude

Her music inventory assessment labeled herself as a CD title: HEADSTRONG CONUNDRUM.

Initial Assessment Results:

Hidden Anger Score (HAS): 13

Unsettled: 37; Soothed: 21; Energized: 22

Negative Current State (NCS): 20

Positive Current State (PCS): 14

Protocol

The Music 4 Life® Music Medicine Mood Sequence Formulas™ was utilized with this client. This protocol was determined appropriate as it is designed to intentionally target a broad emotional range with a profound liberation of moods during a creative, controlled process. Mood Sequence Formulas™ for L included working through anger, anxiety, frustration, and depression to instill the feelings of peace and energy which she desired. The The Music 4 Life® Music Medicine Mood Sequence Formulas™ follows a specific pattern of unsettled music followed by soothed selections and completed by those which are deemed energizing.

L started by completing a client inventory which included demographic information, current issues, desired goals, current medications, side effects of current medications, diagnoses, trauma history, and other vital information; an emotional inventory; and a music inventory. The emotional inventory asked questions to determine hidden anger symptoms; current feelings of unsettledness, being soothed, and energy; negative current state scores; and positive current states. The music inventory explored current preferences for creative arts, instruments, musical styles, songs identified with different emotions or preferences, musical background, and how the client would label themselves if they were a song. These forms were reviewed by the therapists and an interview was completed for further information and details.

L completed an intensive listening session with the therapists the following day to determine songs which trigger specific emotions. For L these included those to work through anger, anxiety, frustration, and depression. Her final listening sequence included fourteen songs from these genres, as follows:

Unsettled: Alternative , Heavy Metal genres

Soothed: Alternative, New Age, Native American, Classical genres

Energized: Jazz, Country, World genres

From these genres a custom CD was formed and burned for L.

L returned the following day for her initial therapeutic listening session. A booklet containing the protocol, a listening guide, song lyrics, a copy of the listening diary and journal, and a copy of the consent for treatment was compiled and given to L. She was placed in a quiet and secluded area of the clinic to complete her listening session. L was prompted to mark how she felt in her diary and to complete the first journal page while she listened. Once she completed her session, the therapists met with her to discuss her reactions and identify any issues with the CD. Protocol dictated that should a sequence not elicit the desired emotional response an additional listening session would be completed to correct the problem and a new CD would be developed. L's CD was determined to be appropriate given her response and post listening feedback. It was also determined that she needed an additional outlet for her anger so she was loaned a large buffalo drum and mallet to utilize during her unsettled listening segments. The holes in her left ear proved to cause problems with her ability to listen without pain, but the therapists' recommendation to place cotton or a tissue in the ear piece of her headphones corrected the issue.

L was instructed to listen to the CD in its entirety as recorded once per day, every day for the next week. At the end of the week L would return to the clinic for a follow-up session. At the end of the first week, progress would be reviewed. Should corrections/adjustments need to be made to the recording, it would be done at that time. L was prompted to continue listening for an additional week with her original CD as it remained appropriate and to return in another week for another follow-up. At the second follow-up it was determined that L could move to a “maintenance” protocol where she could choose one song from each section as she determined appropriate given her current mood state. She would continue updating the therapists on a routine basis.

Results

First Follow-Up at Week One

At L's first follow-up session her scores were as follows:

HAS: 2; Unsettled: 20; Soothed: 35; Energized: 42; NCS: 9; PCS: 26

L shared with the therapists that she was able to listen every day without issue. She stated that she was dealing with her pain better, was not noticing as much anger, frustration, or flashbacks. She told about how she was able to attend a job fair for veterans, speak with potential employers without fear or hesitation, and was interviewed for a segment on a local television station. “It was fun. I wasn't getting sweaty or hot. I didn't want to run out the door. I wasn't afraid of people touching me.” “It was nice to think of myself in a better light.” She also said that she was more motivated to get out and exercise and that the listening “helped me put things into perspective”.

Second Follow-Up at Week Two

At L's second follow-up session her scores were as follows:

HAS: 0; Unsettled: 17; Soothed: 36; Energized: 52; NCS: 9; PCS: 31

L stated that her relationship with her husband was better, she noticed less pressure in her chest and that she was more relaxed and was not as quick to anger. She talked about her relationship with her family and that it was now different in her mind. While desiring to reestablish a relationship with them, she felt she was more clear regarding boundaries. Due to the progress identified, L was moved to maintenance where she could chose a song from each section or from her own library which matched her current emotional state and listen within the same sequence (U, S, E). She would follow up with the therapists on her return from her trip to see her family.

Third Follow-Up at Week Six

At L's third follow-up session her scores were as follows:

HAS: 0; Unsettled: 17; Soothed: 48; Energized: 52; NCS: 8; PCS: 33

L shared how she coped with a potentially dangerous emotional situation while visiting her family. She utilized her CD to help remain calm and find a positive solution to the situation. “I was able to handle it so much better than I ever thought I would. I found some that made me angrier than what we had. I found it helped me let it go when dealing with my sister. I found better ways to deal with it and support my nephew and mom.” “Learning to calm my emotions and regulate my mood it was so much easier to deal with life”. She shared that she had two interviews as a result of her attendance at the job fair and that she'd noticed a decrease of asthma flare-ups when she was upset. L reported that her doctors were pleased with her progress and agreed to discontinue her medications.

Fourth Follow-Up at Week Ten

At L's fourth follow-up session her scores were as follows:

HAS: 8; Unsettled: 25; Soothed: 26; Energized: 24; NCS: 16; PCS: 13

Her follow-up CD title changed to HOLD YOUR HEAD UP HIGH, MY LIFE.

L discussed how she had episodes of pain and swelling on the left side of her face accompanied with extreme sound sensitivity. She had visited an ENT who determined a second hole in her left eardrum. Because of this she was unable to leave her house. She found that previous listening sequences were painful so she stopped utilizing her CD. She decided to formulate her own sequence using music which was not causing pain to help her work through her frustration. L stated “I felt like I was doing something positive rather than falling apart”. She reported being able to visit Hoover Dam using her headphones to mute the sounds and was “OK”. She stated that she would not have been able to adapt to this type of environment prior to completing the listening program. L's music inventory assessment changed from initial assessment to liking more creative arts, more genres, and being more aware of matching music to mood for effective mood regulation.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Conclusions derived from statements from L and scores on her emotional inventories reflect that her Mood Sequence Formulas™ were effective in helping her meet her goals. L was originally referred to Music 4 Life® by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Office of Veteran Services which links veterans to community services that further their education and life goals, including work, housing and post traumatic stress support. This case study reflects the progress of one veteran. Further investigation of the Mood Sequence Formulas™ is warranted to offer improved emotional health for larger populations of veterans to help them work through anger, anxiety, and depression to be able to embrace and engage with family and their community. A longitudinal research study is suggested to examine the long term effects of Mood Sequence Formulas™ with veterans.

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