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# Music Therapy During COVID-19

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One of the most uplifting moments of the pandemic came from a collaboration between Nursing, Volunteer Services and the nonprofit Project: Music Heals Us (PMHU). Below is an oral history of this incredible project, which brought beautiful music to both patients and staff at a moment when we all needed a little break.

**Ayelet Ruppin-Pham (Patient Education Specialist):** In summer 2020, I was looking for some way to contribute positively to the units working so hard to care for our patients.

Knowing that isolation and loneliness were so prevalent on units due to the many COVID-19 restrictions, I wanted to find a way to provide some human connection and peace. I heard about PMHU through a friend who was volunteering with the nonprofit to provide free concerts for UCLA patients. This organization is comprised of professional classical musicians who were similarly looking for ways to share their gifts and provide positive healing experiences. PMHU were so excited to collaborate in providing music to UCSDH – all we needed to do was find the right process and the right pilot units. I reached out to Volunteer Services next. I had a feeling they would love being involved!

**Layah Blacksberg (Director, Experience Operations):** The volunteers at UC San Diego Health are in a unique position to offer support to both patients and team members. Volunteer Services engages community members from across San Diego to assist with a variety of non-medical tasks, allowing the clinical team members to focus on providing critical medical care. Project Music Heals Us is another wonderful example of how volunteer support can impact the healing process.

**Ayelet:** We decided to select two units for the pilot, one in Hillcrest and one in La Jolla. The Hillcrest Eighth Floor and JMC 5FG seemed like the right places to start, because of their unique patient populations and past projects involving complementary therapies.

**Monica Neslage (Manager, Hillcrest 8th Floor):** When Ayelet and Layah approached us with this idea to bring PMHU to the Hillcrest Eighth

## SPOTLIGHT ON CARING

### COVID Care Box from HC PreOp/PACU team

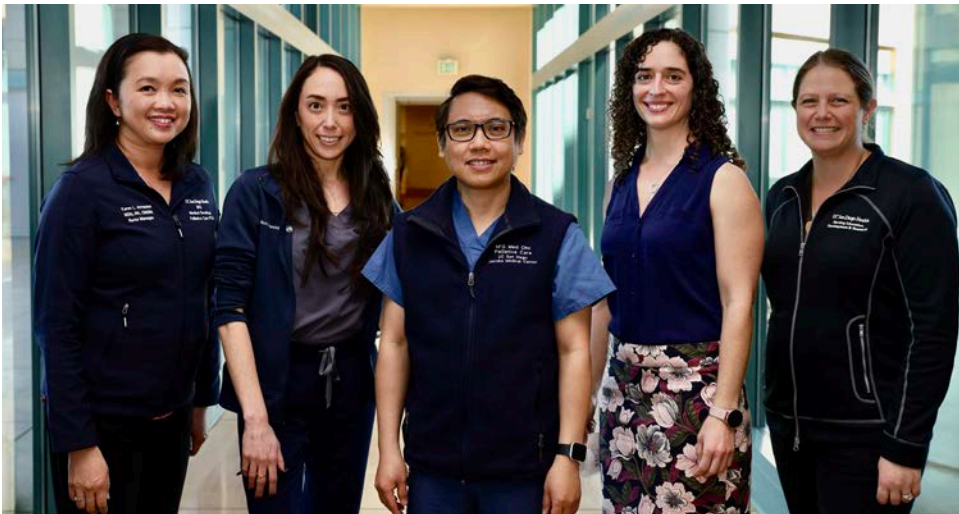
By Sandelle Ongteco RN, BSN, CCRN

During the first COVID-19 surge in San Diego County, UC San Diego Health assigned the Hillcrest CCU, 10 East, 6 East and 11 East as the designated units to take care of COVID-19 positive patients.

Sandelle Ongteco, a Hillcrest Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) nurse, and the rest of the PreOp/PACU staff wanted to do something for these units to recognize how hard staff were working and show them support. Sandelle organized the PreOp/PACU staff to fill each COVID Care Boxes with snacks for COVID staff to enjoy during their short breaks in their busy shifts.

When the PreOp/PACU team surprised the units in Hillcrest with their COVID Care Boxes, they were met with the biggest smiles and lots of gratitude. Sandelle and the rest of PreOp/PACU team have profound respect for all the staff who have given their time and effort to these patients.





L to R: Karen Armenion, Monica Neslage, Noel Viray, Layah Blacksborg, Ayelet Ruppin-Pham.

#### **Karen Armenion, MSN, RN, CMSRN, NE-BC**

Karen has 16 years of nursing leadership experience and 11 years as a nurse manager at UCSDH. Karen holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Cebu Normal University in the Philippines and a Master's Degree in Nursing from the University of Phoenix. One of her proudest achievements is the opening of Jacobs Medical Center 5FG (JMC 5FG), the Medical Oncology and Palliative Care Unit in 2017.

**Monica Neslage, MSN, RN** (she/her) is an Inpatient Nurse Manager for Hillcrest 8th Floor, a 29-bed General Medicine unit. She also oversees the Clinical Care Partner Float Pool and Tele sitting/Video Monitor Department across both Hillcrest and La Jolla sites. Monica graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health from San Diego State University and earned her Masters of Science in Nursing from Cal State University Dominguez Hills. She was born and raised in Southern California and has lived in San Diego the past 11 years, where she started her nursing career as a New Graduate Registered Nurse at UCSDH on 10E.

**Noel Viray MS, RN, GERO-BC, CHPN** Noel Viray MS, RN, GERO-BC, CHPN joined UC San Diego Health in 2015 and has held the position of Asst. Nurse Manager at 5FG Medical Oncology PCU & Palliative Care Unit since it opened in November 2016. He earned his Master's degree in Healthcare Management at California State University -East Bay and was one of the recipients of the UCSDH Nurse Leader of the Year Award in 2016.

**Layah Blacksborg BS, MA** is the Director of Experience Operations and oversees hospital volunteers, staff chaplains, medical interpreters and the guest services team. Layah has been with UC San Diego Health for 6.5 years, originally moving to San Diego in 2015. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Utah and a master's degree from New York University.

**Ayelet Ruppin-Pham MN, RN, PHNA-BC** has worked at UC San Diego Health as the Patient Education Specialist for 12 years. Part of her job includes managing and developing the resources available to teach patients throughout the health system. She received her Bachelor's degree from UCSD in Ethnic Studies and Sociology, and a Masters in Nursing from University of Washington in 2009.

## “Quaran-treats”

By **Andrea Bogardus**

6BMT has a big heart for their patients, team, and community. This dedication to serve others was evident and strengthened throughout the pandemic. Soon after COVID-19 became prevalent in 2020, we realized how demanding being a COVID nurse must be. 6BMT did not have COVID patients on the unit, so we decided to do something to make COVID nurses smile. In April 2020, a BMT nurse, Jennifer Lawrence, spearheaded creating snack carts for the COVID units in La Jolla. Our staff collected donations to purchase treats and Jennifer and team put together the carts for each unit caring for COVID patients. The carts were filled up a few times after delivery.

When July 2020 rolled around and COVID was still rampant, we decided it was time for another “pick-me-up” for JMC ICU. 6BMT collected donations and for this morale booster, we delivered burritos to both day and night shift. Later, as Halloween was approaching, so we wanted to find a creative way to celebrate so we sent “Quaran-treats” (quarantine treats) through the tube station to units throughout La Jolla. Small gestures go a long way to brighten up everyone's day! As COVID continued into 2021, Jennifer Lawrence's neighbor also made a donation of goodie bags for nurses in JMC ICU.



Floor, my first thought was, “How could we not!?” Music is one of the most universal and transcendent ways to connect with others. With COVID-19 impacting every aspect of patient care and how nurses deliver that care, this was a gift that we needed most. We owe it to our patients to do everything in our power to address not only their medical issues, but find ways to connect and support them while they are admitted. Music is another creative way to do just that.

**Karen Armenion (Manager, JMC 5FG, Oncology PCU):** One of our nurses on JMC 5FG, Dash Dingoasen, already sings to his patients when he works. He has been named in Kudos forms several times for doing this. So, when this opportunity came

to us, I naturally thought of Dash and his passion for music. He came on board immediately and led the project implementation on JMC 5FG. Dash met with Volunteer Services and Ayelet and we created our own unit process to provide this service for our oncology and palliative care patients. During the pandemic, this was a breath of fresh air for our patients who were dealing with cancer and its complications. Our staff also found the music inspirational and heartwarming.

**Layah:** The key to making this program work was communication and technology. We established a weekly day and time when musicians would be available to play, and volunteers were scheduled to spend two to three hours on a unit. At first, given the limitations

of volunteer presence on a unit during the pandemic, staff members stepped in to help patients connect to the musicians using Zoom on the iPads already available in the patient rooms. Patients would remain off camera to protect their privacy unless they agreed to connect with the musician. Many of the patients chose to interact with the musicians, requesting songs and sharing their personal musical interests. The nursing staff would often comment that they learned something about the patient from watching these interactions.

**Monica:** Our goals were to improve the patient and staff experience, find new ways to connect patients and give the team another potential intervention to address patient anxiety/uneasiness while in a hospital during a pandemic.

**Karen:** This turned into a CNIII project for Dash. He helped create a process on the unit, provided education to the nurses, measured the patient’s pain before and after music therapy. Another item that we reviewed was the average time for the patients to ask for pain medications after music therapy. The data collected will help support the continuation of this service.

**Ayelet:** You could see the immediate impact of the music on patients and staff. Our first day on the units, staff would gather around the nursing station just to listen for five or ten minutes. Everyone seemed just a little bit calmer afterwards. One of our first patients used his cane to conduct as the violinist played!

**Monica:** The following feedback from the volunteer coordinator remains one of the highlights from staff and patients with regards to this program and summarizes the positive impact we all feel because of reactions like this one:

*“I had a beautiful session with Project Music Heals Us today on the 8th floor at Hillcrest. One of the patients recommended by their nurse was “not interested in television but loved to listen to music”. He was played two songs before requesting Ave Maria. The patient said he was reminded of his grandmother and began to cry. He let Timothy (the musician) know “I didn’t think I would ever be serenaded before I was on my death bed.” He had a chuckle and thanked Timothy. Once we stepped out of the room Timothy said the interaction was very powerful. I was then approached by his nurse and she was crying and thanked*

## SPOTLIGHT ON CARING

### Nursing Self-Care

By Aran Tavakoli, MSN, RN, AOCNS, BMTCC

One of the Holistic Nursing Committee’s missions is to teach nurses to be able to care for ourselves in order to provide care to others. Aran Tavakoli, chair of the Holistic Nursing Committee, recognized the immediate need for coping tools to deal with a stressful, unknown situation that no one had ever before experienced. Throughout 2020, the Holistic Nursing Committee met an immediate need and started holding weekly self-care “Coping during COVID” sessions to support nurses through the pandemic. As healthcare providers on the frontline, we need to be able to focus, remain calm, and be present in order to continue providing excellent care for patients.

Sessions were held weekly on Zoom, with guests presenting on such topics as mindfulness, mantras, self-massage, sleeping well, integrative nutrition, movement for stress relief, and practices to help soothe frazzled nervous systems. Melissa Ford, RN led many of these sessions. Guests included a sleep physician, spiritual services, and Jim Kane, the psychology Clinical Nurse Specialist.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees learned something new, and came away from sessions feeling cared for. Attendees reported that some practices resonated deeply with them and they continued using them. Some practices were even adopted by entire units! The Holistic Nursing Committee continues to meet monthly to explore self-care topics and welcomes everyone to join!

me for visiting her patient. The patient was so moved by the music he called his family members while he was still processing his emotions and asked the nurse what he should do. The nurse told him to “just tell [the person on the phone] you love them.”

I would also like to add that the charge nurse, Radinka Yordanova, who worked with the team that day to provide this service, still states this experience is something she will always remember in her career.

**Karen:** The feedback that we get from patients after they hear the music makes this project worthwhile. One of the patients wrote about Dash, our project leader: ““Thank you for taking care of me so well. You made me feel so comfortable. I also felt almost as if I was at home. I also want to thank you for recommending the Zoom music. It was so nice seeing and hearing them play.”

**Monica:** We have noticed a significant benefit to our underserved and transient patients, who are some of the biggest beneficiaries of this program. This highlights the gaps and disparities we have at just the unit level, and has allowed us to address breaking them down as a team. The 8th floor team noticed that the underserved and transient populations seemed to be the most excited and appeared to benefit emotionally/behaviorally more post-intervention than some of the other admitted patients. We realized our internal bias around which patients would appreciate classical music, which has helped us rethink and improve in our approach to caring for underserved populations (including patients with psychological/neurocognitive diagnoses) and address these gaps as a team so that we can better serve the community.

**Karen:** We are continuing with the program as long as the musicians can partner with us. Some physicians expressed interest in using the same process for PMHU to offer other genres of music, including classical Indian. Music therapy is an important part of our tools to provide exceptional care to our oncology and palliative patients. We want to use all available resources including music therapy to provide the best nursing care.

**Ayelet:** This project has exceeded all our expectations, and we are so grateful to our volunteer musicians, clinicians, as well as the partners in Volunteer Services for making this successful. Programs like this emerge from a great idea, the right team, and commitment to sustainability. I hope we get to see more innovative ideas for healing continue to be adopted for staff and patients

## SPOTLIGHT ON CARING

### UCSD Social Justice Forums

By **Ayelet Ruppin-Pham, MN, RN and Jodi Traver, PhD, RN**

**Social justice, a future desired state and likened to equity, in that a level of fairness may exist for those within the organization.**

Beginning June 2020, two nurses saw the need for a platform for learning, self-reflection and understanding of healthcare’s role in anti-racism. Jodi Traver and Ayelet Ruppin-Pham developed the UCSD Nursing Social Justice Forum, creating a virtual space. They have since held nine forums with over 400 participants from across the health system and academic campus to bring attention to inequities in healthcare and education. Topics discussed in these forums included

implicit bias, the experiences of Black nurses at UCSDH, pandemic and racial disparities, and how to create a more inclusive environment.

In 2022, the forums will be supported with an innovative digital platform to support social justice research and other EDI and social justice-related change management projects, foster connection, and provide educational resources for all staff at the health system and campus. Jodi and Ayelet’s work are acknowledged as a key innovation by the American Nurses Association with mention in the November 2021 issue of My American Nurse, the official ANA publication following an ANA-Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) pre-seed funds award to support the digital pilot.

Nurses like Jodi and Ayelet continue to innovate and curate conversations and actions around equity, diversity and inclusion through mentoring programs, policy development, participation in antiracism committees and partnering with the new Chief Administrative Officer for Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. If you would like to get involved, please consider registering on the EDR Nursing Calendar for the next Social Justice Forum, open to all UCSDH staff and faculty.