Music has had special importance to the individual. It can have a striking effect on patients with Alzheimer’s disease, even sometimes allowing them to focus and become responsive for a time. Music has also been observed to decrease the agitation that is so common with this disease. One study shows that elderly people who play a musical instrument are more physically and emotionally fit as they age than their nonmusical peers.

Music can be an effective tool for the mentally or emotionally ill. Autism is one disorder that has been particularly researched. Music therapy has enabled some autistic children to relate to others and have improved learning skills. Substance abuse, schizophrenia, paranoia, and disorders of personality, anxiety, and affect are all conditions that may be benefited by music therapy. In these groups, participation and social interaction are promoted through music. Reality orientation is improved. Patients are helped to develop coping skills, reduce stress, and express their feelings.

Pain, anxiety, and depression are major concerns with patients who are terminally ill. Music can provide some relief from pain, through release of endorphins and promotion of relaxation. It can also provide an opportunity for the patient to reminisce and talk about the fears that are associated with death and dying. Music may help regulate the rapid breathing of a patient who is anxious, and soothe the mind. The Chalice of Repose project, head-quartered at St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, Montana, is one organization that attends and nurtures dying patients through the use of music, in a practice they called music-thanatology by developer Therese Schroeder-Sheker. Practitioners in this program work to relieve suffering through music prescribed for the individual patient.

Judith Turner

Further Reading

Further Information
American Music Therapy Association, Inc. 8455 Colesville Road, Suite 1000, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA, 20910, (301) 589-3300. http://www.musictherapy.org/.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

A personality test that categorizes people according to stated preferences in thinking and perceiving.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assigns people to one of sixteen different categories or types, based on their answers to 126 questions, such as: “How easy or difficult do you find it to present yourself, consistently, over a long period as a person who is patient?” There are 4 different subscales of the test, which purport to measure different personality tendencies. Extraversion-introversion (E-I) distinguishes between people who are sociable and outgoing, versus those who are more inward looking. Sensing-intuition (S-I) sorts people according to their attention to practical realities as opposed to relying on their imagination. Thinking-feeling (T-F) shows the difference between relying on logic versus intuition when making decisions. Finally, judging-perceiving (J-P) refers to one’s tendency to analyze and categorize one’s experiences, as opposed to responding spontaneously. Sixteen different types emerge from the combination of the above four pairs of traits.

The MBTI is probably the most popular self-insight psychological test in use today, with at least a million people per year completing it. It is widely used in business, industry, educational settings, and government because of its assumed ability to capture people’s interests, needs, and values. MBTI profiles are often used in career counseling or as a basis for matching work partners or for selecting tasks that are best suited for one’s MBTI type.

With any psychological test, its utility is dependent on its reliability and validity. A reliable test is one that produces consistent results over time. For example, IQ tests have high reliability, inasmuch as your IQ as measured today will not be appreciably different a year from now. The MBTI’s reliability is only fair. One study showed that fewer than half of the respondents retained their initial types over a 5-week period. Consequently, we should be careful about making career decisions based on a classification system that is unstable. People change over time as a result of experience. The MBTI may capture a person’s current state, but that state should probably not be treated as a fixed typology. Does the MBTI assist in career counseling? Is the test diagnostic of successful performance in particular occupations? These questions pertain to validity—the ability of the test to predict future performance. There have been no long-term studies showing that successful or unsuccessful careers can be predicted from MBTI profiles. Nor is there any evidence that on-the-job performance is related to MBTI scores. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the MBTI’s popularity and its proven scientific worth. From the point of view of the test-taker, the MBTI provides positive feedback in the form of unique attributes that are both vague and complimentary, and thus could appeal to large numbers of people. It is possible that the MBTI could be useful as a vehicle for guiding discus-
sions about work-related problems, but its utility for career counseling has not been established.

Further Reading

Timothy Moore