

Interview with Gérard Mick, neurologist

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Gérard Mick, neurologist and neurobiologist at the Voiron Hospital and consultant at the Lyon Neurological Centre, will explain his work with Alzheimer and Parkinson patients.



Neurologist and neurobiologist Gérard Mick believes that music can considerably improve the quality of life of patients. (Guillaume Decalf/France Musique)

France Musique: Can music have a real impact on people suffering from neurodegenerative diseases?

Gérard Mick: With Alzheimer's patients, we notice relaxing effects in those who are agitated. If we make them listen to music that they know or that they have already played between 20 and 40 years old, it stimulates them and modifies their behaviour. It's very beneficial in centres where some patients can be aggressive, annoying to others and to staff. You just play them a song, they all gather around where the sound is coming from and they calm down, some start dancing.

Through music, social cohesion and the art of living together can be restored. Most of the time, it helps to treat behavioural disorders and also to revitalise and remobilise people who have lost communication or movement.

Although these effects are transient and are felt at the moment the music is played, we can repeat them over and over again. These effects have a great emotional impact, as people remember these pieces and the important moments in their lives. People suffering from Alzheimer's disease have not lost all their memory, they usually remember memories from their youth. And thanks to music, we can remobilise them. In a way, we can succeed in making these people "live again", especially when they have lost some communication and are no longer able to have spontaneous emotions.

So the famous adage: "Music softens the soul" is proven?

And I would go even further and say that music can also ease pain. This is especially true for patients with chronic pain, i.e. those who suffer from multiple injuries and whose pain lasts for more than three months. When we are in pain, we feel a strongly negative emotion. The pleasure of music is generally perceived as a very positive emotion.

We ask the patients what their favourite songs are and with that we can counteract this negative state and help fight the pain. We only suggest that when they feel like it and think that it can reduce their pain or calm the anxiety of the pain coming on, that they use the music as if you were listening to it at home to enjoy it.

And the results are quite amazing. When someone is suffering all the time and can access moments of calm, it is very positive and very facilitating to recover health. And there are only advantages: no side effects, simple to use because people listen to what they like. So it's very individualised. And for those who are professional or amateur musicians, it is even stronger. It stimulates them to find a life project and move forward.

You go from suffering to hedonism. That's one of the very powerful things about music, that it's a distractor, it's emotionally very meaningful and it's remobilising. So with music we are able to improve people's quality of life.

What made you interested in the power of music for the sick?

It's as simple as any music lover's reasoning. When you know how much music can give you strong emotions, pleasure and thrills, you think that the power of listening to music is wonderful. Moreover, I have been lucky enough to practice music since I was very young, and when you can play with people, and communicate with them, the impact of music is even more striking.