Vibroacoustic Treatment & Multimodal Music Therapy: Developing a Clinical Model for Functional Neurological Disorder (FND)

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Abstract

FND is a neuropsychiatric condition in which patients experience symptoms that are clinically incompatible with neurological or medical conditions, resulting in significant functional impairment and distress. Patients can experience a wide range of symptoms, including dissociation, seizures, differences in gait, paralysis and/or chronic pain. In addition to the spectrum of symptom experiences, the diagnosis sits at an interdisciplinary overlap between neurology and psychiatry, making it difficult for professionals to determine suitable treatment plans individualised to their patients’ needs.

Based on the existing recommendations and positive implications for interdisciplinary and multimodal approaches to therapy for patients with FND, the current study proposes the use of a psychotherapeutically oriented approach to both vibroacoustic therapy (VAT) and music therapy. VAT is a mind-body approach to music therapy, and combines the use of pulsed sinusoidal low-frequency sound, music listening, and therapeutic interaction to treat a patient’s physiological and psychological needs simultaneously. Active music therapy methods will allow for further processing on a symbolic level by creating music in a supportive environment with the therapist.

A pilot study was conducted in 2017-2018, with results published early in 2021. The author’s PhD research aims to further develop and refine this interdisciplinary clinical protocol by conducting multiple individual case studies. There are three sub-aims to guide progression of the study: to gain a more complete understanding of patients’ dynamic experiences with their FND diagnosis, to define elements of clinical assessment, clinical interventions, and practice (as they pertain to this clinical population), and to evaluate the efficacy of the refined protocol in order to contribute to future larger-scale trials.