Abstract Summary:
Autism affects one in every 68 children manifesting in cognitive and behavioral challenges. Music therapy provides a cost-effective treatment for improving outcomes without the negative side effects associated...
with pharmacologic treatments. Nurses can recommend and provide this patient-centered treatment for improved outcomes.

Learning Activity:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE</th>
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<td>Following this presentation, the learner will be able to apply the nursing process to coordination of holistic care for autistic children and their families by including music therapy.</td>
<td>(1) Assess child’s developmental level and readiness for music therapy; (2) Assess severity of developmental disorder (on the spectrum); (3) Link types of music therapy to severity of condition; (4) provide family education about how to implement music therapy at home; (5) coordinating music therapy in the acute care setting</td>
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<td>Discuss the benefits of music therapy compared to pharmacologic treatments.</td>
<td>(1) Types of pharmacologic treatments (med classes) and associated side-effects; (2) benefits of music therapy on social and cognitive outcomes (3) compare and contrast pharmacologic and music therapy treatments</td>
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Abstract Text:

The number of individuals impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the United States has grown to 1 in 68 according to most recent estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Depending on where individuals fall on the spectrum, autism manifests in a range of cognitive challenges and altered social interaction patterns. Lacking the ability to read and process emotion in others, autistic individuals face difficulty engaging in social reciprocity. As a result, social isolation is a commonplace consequence.

Traditionally, simulants, antipsychotics, and serotonin reuptake inhibitors are prescribed to enhance social functionality. Unfortunately, these pharmacologic treatments only mask the underlying problems and can further contribute to social isolation. Moreover, the pharmacologic regimens, particularly when administered in combinations of medications, result in mood instabilities, over-sedation, extrapyramidal effects, and even physiologic stressors such as tachycardia. The purpose of this project is to evaluate music therapy, a form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), to determine whether its benefits have equal or greater value than traditional clinical and pharmacological ASD interventions. The hypothesis associated with this project was: “Music therapy provides a cost-effective treatment for autism that lacks the undesirable side effects of traditional medications.” The evidence-based question associated with this project was: “What are the benefits of music therapy among children with autism spectrum disorder in relation to those who are treated pharmacologically?”

A literature review was performed searching EBSCOhost and CINAHL databases using key words: Music therapy, ASD, CAM, children, and pharmacologic treatment. A total of nine published and peer reviewed articles from this search were included in this review. Results of this review revealed that music therapy can increase positive family interactions, social interactions with peers and teachers at school, development of friendships, and a decrease in overall social isolation. Music therapy is a flexible option, able to be implemented on an individual basis or in group settings. Further benefits of music therapy include a lack of any known negative side-effects, which often accompany pharmacological techniques. Furthermore, music therapy is relatively inexpensive and does not require health care practitioners for implementation at home. Thus, this treatment is accessible to low-income families and those living in underserved areas where healthcare is not readily accessible.
Nurses can utilize the nursing process to advocate for music therapy as an effective treatment for autism. Patient and family members’ knowledge about music therapy should be assessed, along with the current treatment regimen, its effectiveness and side effects. Patient and family education should be provided to inform them about the benefits of music therapy and how to implement it at home. Lastly, an inter-professional team including physicians and case managers should be involved in education about music therapy and incorporating it into the treatment of autism.

As promising outcomes and evidence based practices continue to emerge through research, music therapy will only become more prevalent as a successful form of intervention in both a hospital and school-based setting.