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2011-05-02

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### Repository Citation

Schmolze, Daniel B. and Makowski, Suzana, "Uniting Student Musicians and Patients: A Quality Improvement Project" (2011). University of Massachusetts Medical School. *Senior Scholars Program*. Paper 116.

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# Uniting Student Musicians and Patients A Quality Improvement Project

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## Introduction

Music has been established to have therapeutic value for hospitalized patients in specific studies<sup>1-4</sup>, and hospitals across the country are increasingly incorporating live music into models of patient-centered care<sup>5</sup>.

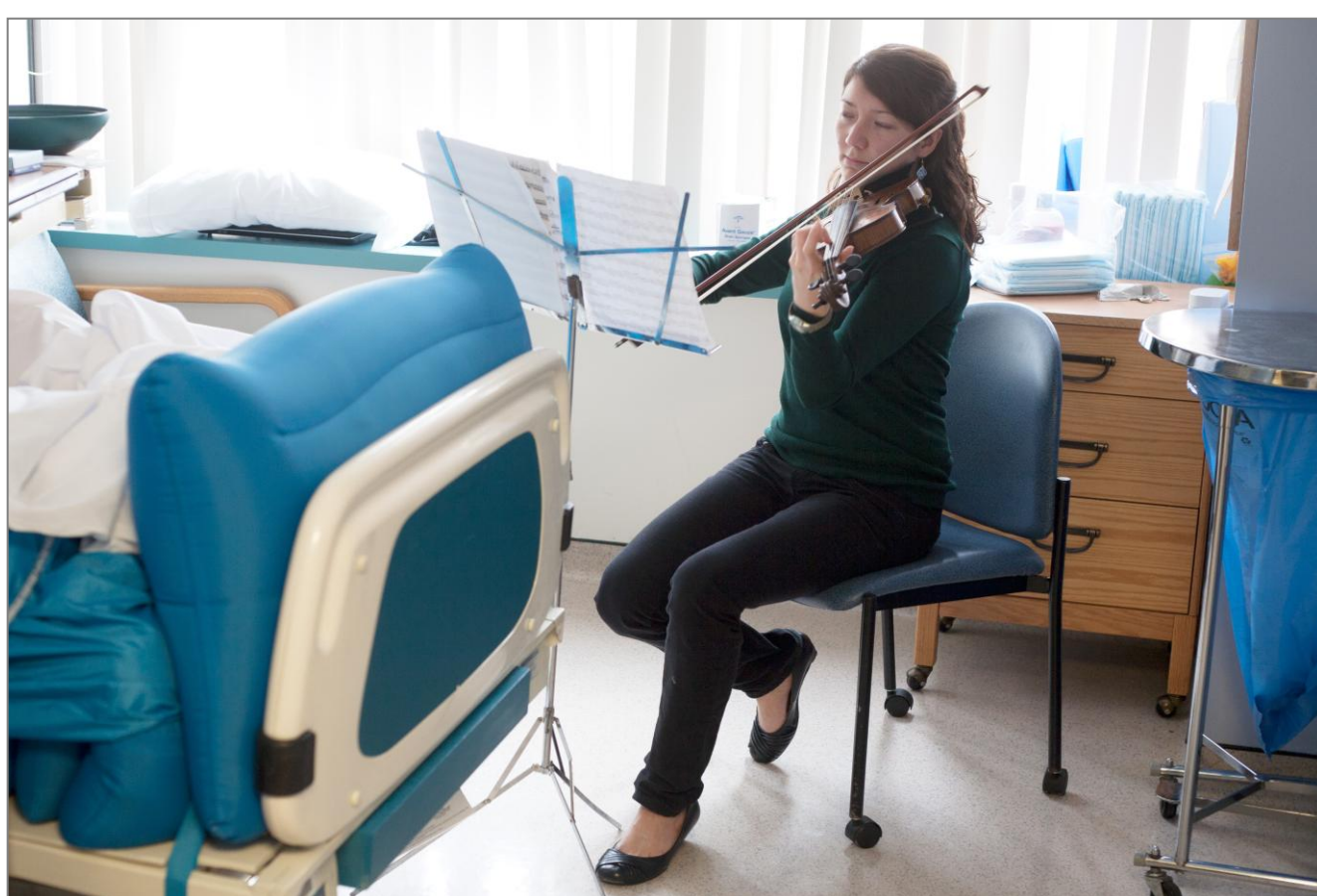
Music has also been shown to have tremendous benefits for the performer. For students of the health professions in particular, music offers stress relief and the opportunity to empathically communicate with patients outside of the typical patient-provider relationship.



The aims of this project were to unite student musical volunteers with hospitalized patients and to assess the results from the perspectives of the students, the hospital staff and the patients.

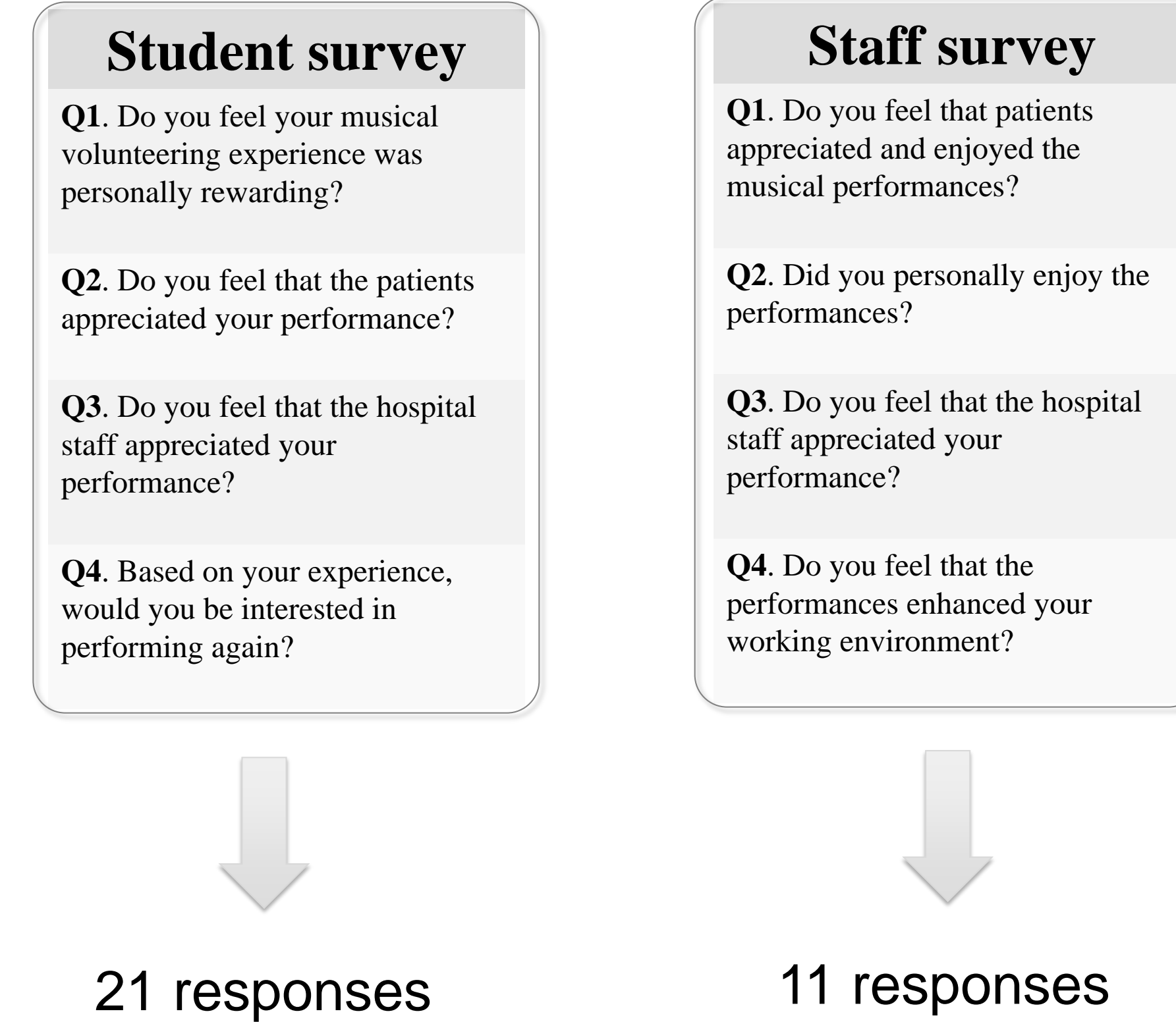
## Methods

Student musicians were recruited via email from the UMass Medical School and the Graduate School of Nursing, with an **initial pool of 47 students** expressing interest in performing. Over a period of several months, **21 performances were held** on the Oncology floor and in the Bone Marrow Transplant unit. Qualitative data was collected via online survey from the student volunteers and from the nursing staff, and informal feedback was obtained from patients.



## Results

Qualitative survey data was collected from the performer for each performance. A separate survey collected data from the nursing staff.



### Survey responses

- Almost uniformly positive
- Students felt appreciated by the patients and staff, and felt the experience was personally rewarding
- Nursing staff enjoyed the performances, and felt that they enhanced the work environment

*"it was great to work with patients in a non medical way and bring them a little bit of distraction from their illness"*

*"they repeatedly told me how much they enjoyed it"*

*"patients really enjoyed the music"*

*"I absolutely felt that the music reduced my stress level"*

### Patient responses

Patients were not formally surveyed, but in general they appeared to very much enjoy the performances. Patients on the Bone Marrow Transplant unit in particular seemed to enjoy a break from the monotony of their often long stays.

### Hiccups, barriers, etc.

- Occasional difficulties in coordinating performances
- Initial pool of 47 students proved too small for desired schedule of several performances per week
  - #1 complaint from nursing staff: not enough performances!

## Conclusions

Taken as a whole, student musical volunteering in the hospital setting appears to be of great benefit as both a quality improvement tool and as a means of engaging students with patients.

Patients appreciate the personal attention and a break from the monotony of hospitalization, while hospital staff reports a more pleasant working environment.

Students are able to connect directly with patients in a non-medical role, which can be deeper and more meaningful than a brief encounter during work rounds. Additionally, pre-clinical students are exposed to the hospital setting and to patients at an earlier juncture in their medical careers.

Successful implementation of such a program requires tight communication between student volunteers and nursing staff. An enthusiastic nursing supervisor proved invaluable for facilitating performances. Even so, there were occasional communication glitches.

Many students expressed initial interest in performing, but a pool of 47 potential performers proved too small to accommodate several performances per week. Attempts to set performances in advance proved unfruitful, as students' schedules were too unpredictable.



## Future Directions

This study was a pilot project that collected only qualitative data. Recruitment of volunteers continues, and plans are underway to create an official student group. Other ideas being considered include the following:



- Expansion to other areas of the hospital
- Recruitment of musicians in the community
- Collection of data from patients
- Collection of quantitative data (e.g. length of hospitalization, PRN pain medication usage, etc.)
- Incorporation of music therapy theory

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Vicky Koertge and the entire nursing staff on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor and on the BMT unit. Thanks also to all the volunteers who lent their time and talents to this effort!

## For further information

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