

Whistle while you work

Music is an under-used tool in the pharmacy environment

Music has charms to soothe a savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.

—W. Congreve,
The Mourning Bride

If you don't play music in your pharmacy you may be missing out on numerous opportunities—to increase employee performance and efficiency, to reduce dispensing and clerical errors, to reduce workplace stress, and to increase frontshop sales.

Music is art, but the use of music in work and retail environments is a science. And when you employ the

science of music your staff tends to feel happier, be more efficient and be more productive. They feel better because they are less fatigued and less tense. Your customers will be more relaxed, allowing them to shop in a more leisurely manner. In general, people feel better about where they are—whether they're working, shopping, or simply waiting for their prescription to be filled—if they're listening to the right music.

We all know the power music has in our own lives. Think about what you listen to when you're driving, when you want to relax, when you're happy—or sad. Chances are the

music you listen to depends on your mood and on the need the music is meant to fulfill.

Although music has been used by civilizations since the beginning of recorded history, the "science of music" is quite new. When speaking of workplace or retail-space music, we're not talking about loud, overbearing sound. We're discussing background music. When we experience background music we passively hear but do not (necessarily) actively listen—yet 76% of consumers make "where to shop" decisions based on emotional factors and 86% of retail customers say music makes a difference in where they shop.

How do we apply the science of music to our place of business? We take a focused approach and apply different music to the distinct areas of the pharmacy (with the unique needs of those areas in mind). In the dispensary you want music that will allow your staff to focus on the tasks at hand: music that will help them concentrate, and therefore reduce

errors. In the waiting area you want music that will make time pass quickly and provide some relief from pain or discomfort. In the counselling area you want music that makes both patient and staff feel at ease, encouraging interaction. And finally, in the front shop you want music that improves your customers'



EFFICIENCY BY DESIGN

by Wayne Caverly

sense of enjoyment while allowing them to linger—spending more money. Music can do all this, and more.

Today we'll focus on the needs of the dispensary staff. In a future issue we'll explore how to improve your

customers' shopping experience and increase frontshop sales.

We all know that a negative mood negatively affects our performance and, as our performance worsens, we experience a loss of control over our work. This results in a reduction of effort and a seemingly inescapable spiral into inefficiency and errors. One way to reverse these feelings is to create a positive atmosphere where everyone feels their work counts. Pleasant music has been shown to reduce perceptions of failure and reduce the negative effects on individuals' performances.

A joint study by the University of Washington and the Muzak Corporation found statistically significant increases in accuracy rates when Muzak was played in a work environment. Compared to silence, listening to the radio resulted in a 2.3% increase in accuracy while listening to Muzak resulted in a 25.8% increase. One of the ways music improves accuracy is by reducing our perception of background noise (from computer printers, for example). A southern U.S. utility company tested music in their finance department and after nine months reported an 18.6% increase in productivity and a 37% decrease in errors.

Playing the right music in the dispensary can improve problem-solving skills, enhance creative thinking and improve the use of time allotted for cognitive tasks (like DUR). But what's the right music to improve our problem-solving skills? On a busy day in your pharmacy I'm sure you sometimes feel like a "mouse in a maze," so let me tell you about a study of how music affected real mice in a maze. Seventy-two mice were run through a maze that took about 10 minutes. One-third of the mice were then exposed to Mozart, one-third to no music and one-third to the heavy-metal band Anthrax. Four weeks later, the mice took to the maze again: the Mozart mice ran the maze in 90 seconds, the silent mice took five minutes, and the heavy-metal mice—an astonishing 30 minutes.

The music you play for staff and clients is very important. When chosen and used properly, it can reduce blood pressure, lower pulse rates and slow respiration, increase calmness and reduce anxiety. Indeed, recent research at Wilkes University reports that when students listened to "smooth jazz" they showed significantly increased production of certain antibodies that are associated with protection against respiratory infections—in a word, music can actually help fight the common cold!

Music—the universal language—can improve our health, our workspace, our shopping environments and our bottom line. All we have to do is listen. ❁

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